

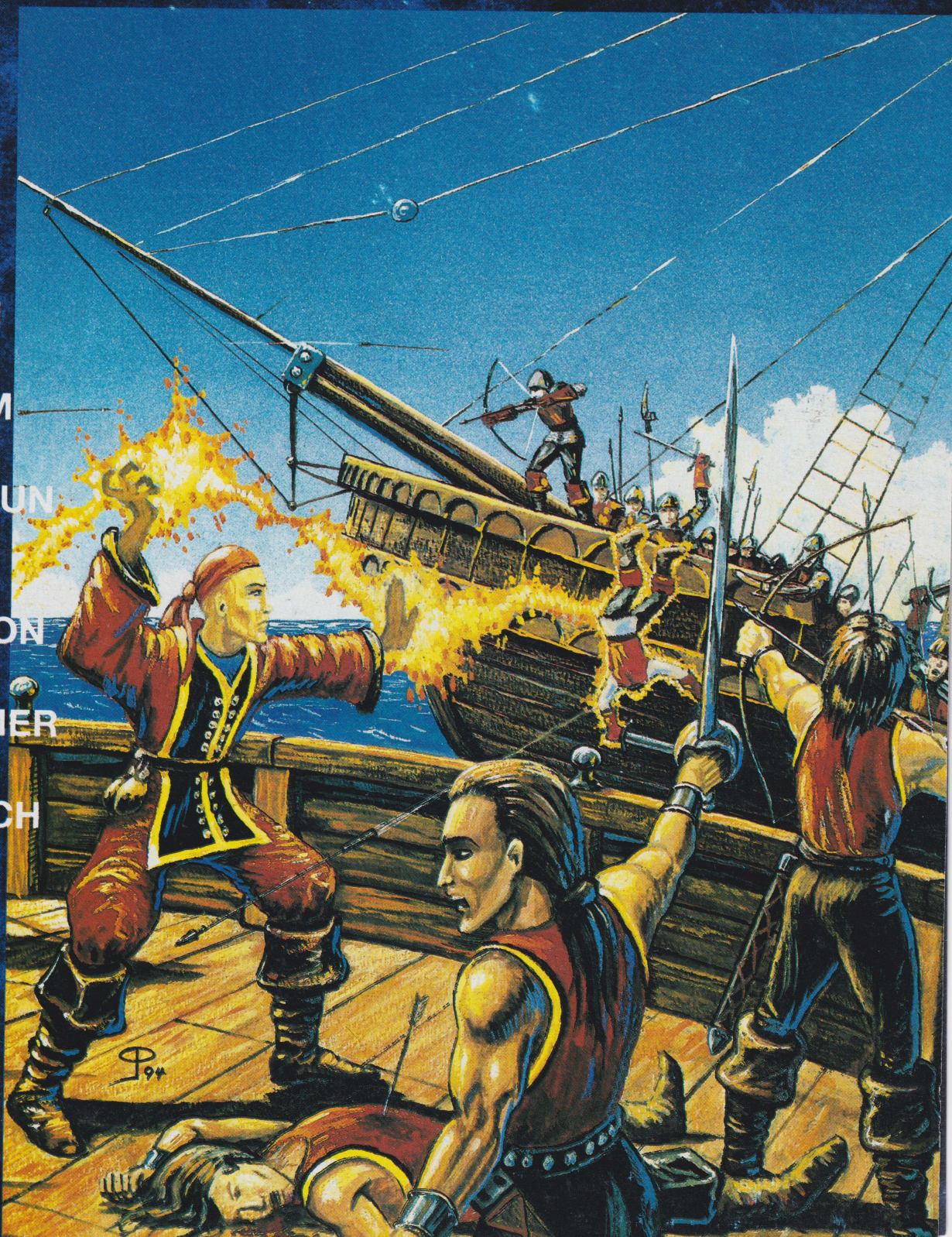
ISSUE
17

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Australian Realms

Issue 17, May/June 1994

The Australian Magazine of Role Playing

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SPECIAL THANKS TO: James Chao

Editorial Letters

Remember yoyos? Rubik's cube? How about Trivial Pursuit? What did all these things have in common? The addictive power to become a world encompassing craze which made their inventors fabulously wealthy. Well it looks like its happening again this time for Richard Garfield and Wizards Of The Coast with their trading card game Magic: The Gathering. This game is simply phenomenal - almost everyone who tries it is hooked, retailers cannot keep it in stock, distributors are screaming for more, and the creators are as surprised as everyone else.

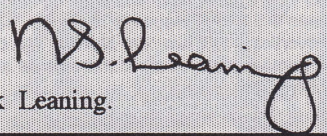
Now, like all the other crazes, the chances are this will be a fad that wears out in time, but until then the really exciting thing for us roleplayers is that Magic: The Gathering has the potential to attract literally thousands of high school and college students to the hobby.

Pass me that deck.

The issue of sexism in gaming is never far away; it is a marketers truism that sex sells and more sex sells more. My view is fairly clear on all things market driven - we, the consumers, gets what we pays for. If we don't want to see exploitative images of women on game products then we tell the manufacturers so by refusing to buy their products.

Unfortunately this doesn't work too well if the predominant attitude of consumers these products are aimed at is sexist, knowingly or otherwise. What can we do about this? I think the best thing to do is to open up the floor and debate the issue, to raise awareness amongst gamers and hopefully to come to a new understanding of what it is we do to women when we patronise these images. Having said all that; I'd like to pose this question to gamers everywhere. If we are eager to adopt the politically correct view that sexism is unacceptable in role playing games where do we stand on racism and violence? It seems to me that the notion of bashing an orc over the head and condoning the action on the basis of character motivations is as invidious of racist violence as vicariously enjoying the image of a half-naked female elf is of sexist oppression of women.

Where do you draw the line?


Nick Leaning.

**Ken Ray,
Woden ACT**

Dear Realms,

I must take Adam Whitt to task about comments he made in his review of the "Book of Artifacts" in Australian Realms Issue 16. While I am not questioning his lack of enthusiasm for the book itself (and, lets face it, how many TSR books since the original 3 AD&D books in the late 1979s have been worth buying?), but I strongly disagree with his remarks about using artifacts in general.

In the hands of an inexperienced DM, they can destroy a campaign, but, used properly, they can revitalise and add a whole new dimension to good roleplaying. I have been playing (and DMing) AD&D for over 15 years, and the occasions when artifacts have been involved were memorable, and enjoyable for all. Artifacts are not "mega-destructive block buster magic items", but an opportunity for creative gaming and new encounters.

A party should not "just stumble over" powerful magic... "What's in the chest? Three +6 Holy Avengers, A Robe of the Magi, a bunch of dragon orbs, and this strange blacked hand".... Rather, finding an artifact is an adventure itself. Then, the party must learn how to master its powers, and to circumvent its side effects. A high level thief of mine is still trying to get rid of some of the less desirable effects from an artifact in one campaign - and she never even used the item, merely looked at it.

Adam - don't avoid artifacts - they can be a major chapter in a campaign themselves. All it takes is a little creativity on the DM's part, and the maturity on the player's part to role play their characters.

**Anja Henkelmann
Wollongong, NSW**

Hi there,

OK, I thought I could get away with filling in your form [Reader's Poll], but now I think I have to explain a bit more.

I got my first copy of AR when I was still living in Europe (1 1/2 months ago) and I was impressed. When I came here to study for a year, the first thing I did was buying the recent issue of AR. And I still think that it is a good magazine.

What I really don't like is that you give me a hard time to know whether an article is an article and not an ad. The Lone Star thing (issue 16, p13) I mistook for an ad and only when I turned the page I discovered it was actually something from the table of contents. Clearing the layout might help.

I would like to see the months on the cover of the mag, so that I instantly know what month's issue it is.

I miss a Con-calender very much. As I

am new to this country, I have to rely on your mag in order to know what's going on. I have to stress this is the *only* point that is disappointing about AR. Please try and change that. Perhaps you could also try establishing a page where clubs and groups could advertise their regular gaming meetings and their address.

More of the NEWS page with lots of news from the (hopefully existing) Australian market.

From the two issues I know I can say that I just love your cover art. And the layout is wonderful. I also like the overall tone of your articles. Unfortunately Unae doesn't seem to be a world I would like to explore (I prefer high-fantasy-fairy-tale-like worlds). And the artwork inside the mag is very good, too.

I liked both (article and art) from Karen Ogden very much! More from her!

That's all! I hope you can do something with this here.

**Robert Jackson
Murrumba Downs, QLD**

Dear Australian Realms,
Greetings.

First, let me congratulate you on the success of your magazine - no mean feat in the world of Australian publishing.

The reason I am writing to you is that a friend showed me a copy of issue 15 the other day. While I generally enjoyed it, when I read Karen Ogden's article I was quite frankly amazed. I hunted up the previous issue to read the first part of the article. And before I make any further comment I should note that it was a female friend who brought my attention to the article and shared my feelings on it.

Although Karen no doubt intended her articles to be about sexism in gaming (and this is quite a noble cause), I unfortunately did not interpret them in this way. Female characters, to my mind, should be played in the same way as my female friends, whom I respect, act - in other words strong of character and humour, and willing to participate in the party and put their ideas forward. Not, as the article suggests, as petty, vindictive and revenge driven. The "femme fatale" idea is as an old and insulting cliché as the "fantasy female with big breasts". My suggestions would be to include female NPCs with whom the party can respect and talk to - and if they don't, make it clear that blatant sexism will not be tolerated in your game (yes, you can demand it!). Encourage women to play in your favourite game by showing that you *can* game without outmoded sexist themes.

Suggestions that the woman should get a man to do the dirty work for her (set up the revenge and then get your brother/friend to beat them up), seem to me to be lacking the imagination and subtlety the article purports to show.

And to say male gamers lack

imagination is such a sweeping generalisation - almost a sexist statement (yes, it can cut both ways). Try reversing the gender and see if you agree.

Sorry for raving on but after reading that many people agreed with the views in these articles, it got me concerned - I would hope women would game for respect not revenge.

Brad Martin
Blackbutt QLD

Dear AR,

Issue 16 is definitely your best yet so keep 'em coming. I think the best thing about your magazine is that it covers a wide variety of RPG systems, so appeals to all gamers (or it should!).

My favourite articles in AR are the ones about Dark Sun and other AD&D segments. Also your Earthdawn features are much appreciated. The articles about plot ideas with female characters are great and hopefully will encourage more female gamers.

Regarding past letters for and against AD&D, I believe everyone should give their opinion but anyone who doesn't like it should remember everyone's different!

Anyway I just want to say that TSR's Dragon magazine better watch out 'cause AR is coming!

Tim Silby
PO Box 892, Sale, VIC

Dear Realms,

D&D: While many people may have mourned the passing of 1st edition AD&D, I am more saddened by the demise of D&D (I'm a bit late here, but hell). I started playing D&D in 1987 when a lot of kids started on Basic then went on to AD&D, but we stuck to the simpler system through the Expert, Companion and Master levels. We never got to play Immortals. There certainly were many restrictions in D&D not present in Advanced, but there was enough scope for us without a plethora of extra rules and dice rolls that were part of AD&D.

Unfortunately I had to stop play for a while and the next thing I knew, all the rules had been packed into one book, the new D&D was released, and the omnipresent AD&D 2nd Edition with its voluminous manuals and hardbacks, had all but engulfed the small space left for the original game. I guess that's just the way it goes.

PBM: Recently I started playing the Midgard PBM and I can't find enough good things to say about it. PBMs even remotely interested should check it out, its brilliant.

Music: I am a huge fan of English band Jethro Tull. Because I feel responsible for the conversion of all Australians to Jethro Tull fandom, I would like to tell you how good they are but I'd be here until next week, so I'll just try to spark your interest; Tull's "Broadsword and the Beast" album draws on fantasy concepts and images in much of its lyrics.

Movies: If anyone does not think that the director's cut of "Bladerunner" is probably the best sf movie ever made, they need their thinking patterns re-arranged, possibly with an axe.

Books: I recently purchased "The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction", probably the best \$100 I've ever spent (and I've spent a lot). SF fans should check it out. Ditto to the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" original BBC radio series on CD. Fantastic.

Well, I've taken up a few moments of your life I hope you don't regret, and I hope you didn't throw up with me cramming opinions down your throat. To quote Dylan Thomas, "Somebody's boring me, I think its me." I'd better give it a rest for now. Thanks, and I hope Gargoyle stays around.

Editor's Note: Tim asked us to print his full address so that anyone with similar interests can correspond with him.

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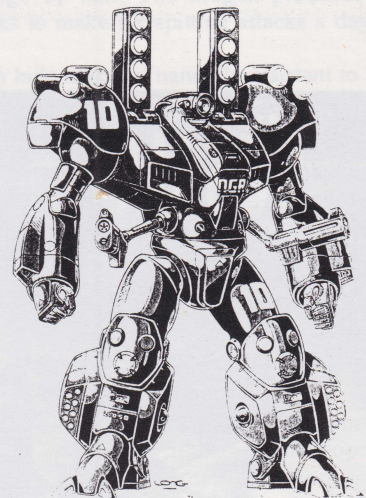
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Reviews

DARK MILLENNIUM

Warhammer 40,000 Supplement
by Games Workshop

Reviewed by Wesley Brooks



Dark Millennium follows the release of the new Warhammer 40,000 boxed set as Battle Magic followed on from Fantasy Battle.

Opening the square box I found the artwork and presentation up to Games Workshop's usual high standard. The Psychic Powers have excellent representation on their cards and templates. The Vehicle cards provide fast and easy reference to the stats that you require, most have a photograph of a beautifully painted Citadel miniature.

Two thirds of the short (32) page rulebook is dedicated to the rules for Psychic Powers. These are very good with only a few of the seemingly mandatory loopholes that lead to rules abuse. The remainder of the book outlines rules for Grey Knight Terminators, Daemons, Strategy Cards, Vehicle Squads, Support Weapon Batteries, Vehicle Cards, and Space Marine Dreadnaughts plus new victory points tables. Filling out the box are numerous new templates - the psychic footprint of Mork is awesome, and printed on both sides so you can use both feet; Psykic Power cards, and heaps (55) of new Wargear cards. Watch out for those Assassins with Polymorphin. All this material provides for a much more comprehensive game.

The Psyker rules are an improvement on the earlier editions, now making each army's psyker unique in abilities and its destructive

force. Each race in the Warhammer universe has access to different types of powers, take for example the Eldar Destructos power (with a highly colourful template) which causes much mayhem as it arcs across the battlefield each psychic phase or the Squat Force Dome (also using a template) which can be used to trap enemy forces or vehicles within its almost indestructible energy field. There are many tactical decisions to be made when utilising pyskers under the new rules which adds depth, colour and excitement to the tabletop.

The addition of more Strategy cards is one thing that really improves the game, giving you and your opponent 18 new situations to alter the outcome of the battle. Vehicles are also well done; they allow for extensive customising which will keep your opponent guessing about the abilities of your forces.

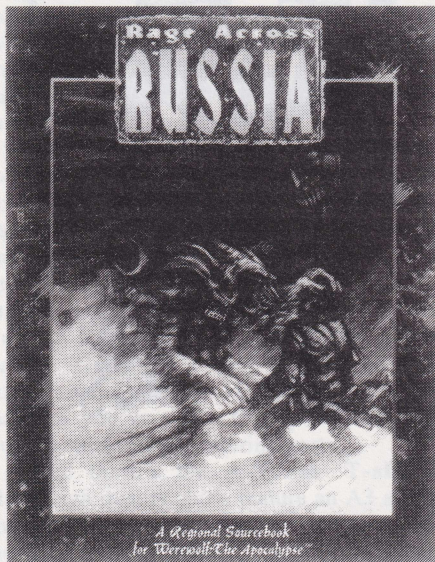
Having played only two games with the **Dark Millennium** rules I'm loath to play without them. The additional rules are quick and easy to pick up and add so much flavour to this already great game that it makes me want to play more and more. All I have to do is finish painting my ever-increasing force of Blood Angel Marines.

In summary, **Dark Millennium** is value for money. If you play Warhammer 40,000 this supplement will be an enjoyable must.

RAGE ACROSS RUSSIA

A Werewolf Sourcebook
by White Wolf

Reviewed by Colin Taber



When I heard that this sourcebook was going to be released it was with a mixture of trepidation and interest that I waited for a copy. Once received my first reaction was negative, why? The book has been written by American writers, and as the Australian market should know by experience; American writers can't accurately create a sourcebook for another country that they have probably never visited, let alone lived in. In these situations research has to be thorough and good planning is a must.

So, considering this first hurdle of the writers not being native to Russia, did they do enough research? Well, yes, sort of. Historically they have presented a detailed time line of events that showcase the power of the Garou, their fall and the rise of the Vampire controlled Soviet Union. At times a naivety that can only be achieved by not really be comfortable with what you're talking about shows, but generally these few weaknesses can be overlooked in favour of the full unveiling of the Garou's life and death struggle with the Wyrms in Russia. This coupled with the welcomed inclusion of new details on Baba Yaga, the most powerful of Russian vampires balances the book, but to leave her out would have been to leave the product incomplete.

The book is typical *Werewolf*, with lots of black and white art of generally good quality, and also various hooks and stories in the text that ooze the creativity that made White

Wolf great. As a quick summary **Rage Across Russia** covers Russian/Garou history, Russian/Vampire history, Russian geography, the Tribes, the Garou's main enemies - including Pentex and a section detailing possible stories that can be set in Russia. At 126 pages and with a wealth of information the book is reasonably good value for your money, but on the other hand there simply isn't enough room to completely cover the subject matter; the amount of detail you can squeeze into a sourcebook of this size simply isn't going to come close to doing justice to Russia's varied regions, peoples and culture.

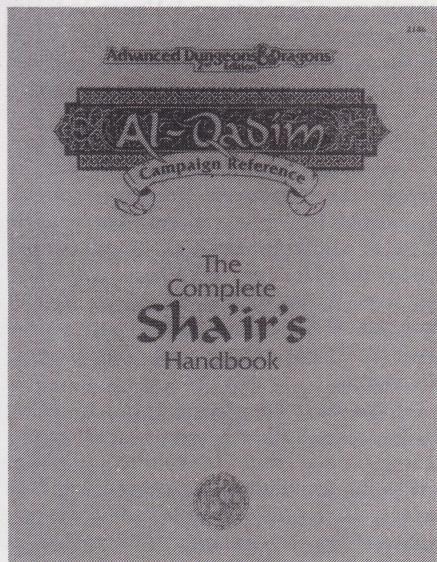
My overall conclusion is that while this is a good addition to the *Werewolf* line, it is only barely that, and without substantial support - for example a second source book that involves or covers Russia in further more specific detail, or an adventure, or better yet an epic global campaign - this book will only ever be 'just' useful. I expect that players using this book will feel they are raging across a fairly familiar (American) landscape rather than exploring the possibilities for change that a Russian sourcebook promises.

To get the best out of **Rage Across Russia** a referee would have to be prepared to do a fair bit of their own research, and while this is often the case for game sourcebooks, it should not be the expectation.

SHA'IR's HANDBOOK

AD&D 2nd Edition Supplement
by TSR RRP \$34.95

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard



I may be biased, but I think that the *Al-Qadim* campaign setting is one of the best things that TSR has done in a long time, and this latest release continues that tradition of excellence. **The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook** is probably a misleading title however, as this volume covers much more than the gen-summoning wizards introduced in the original *Arabian Adventures Handbook*.

Presentation is solid; while there are no colour plates (a common feature of most other TSR products), the many black-and-white illustrations are excellent, invoking just the right feeling of adventure and mystery.

At the now 'standard' length of 128 pages, the handbook is divided into four distinct sections. The first section covers the three wizard kits (Sorcerer, Elementalist, Sha'ir) that are unique to the Land Of Fate, expanding on each by covering such topics as apprentices, sorcerous duels, summoning gens and binding genies. Section two provides eight new wizard kits for those who like to play wizards with a difference. Each of the new kits (Astrologer, Mechanician, Digitalogist, Ghul Lord, Jackal, Mageweaver, Mystic Of Nog and Spellslayer) is an original concept which fits in extremely well with the overall 'Arabian Nights' feel of this campaign setting. While some of these kits may not be as practical for players as others (especially players who are not in a one DM,

one player situation), all kits would make excellent NPCs if encountered.

Section three introduces a number of new sorcerous societies, the original Arabian Adventures Handbook having only the 'Brotherhood of the One True Flame' for PCs to contend with. Each of the new societies is well described and logical in its goals, most providing excellent ideas for adventure hooks (the Red Eyes, Spellslayers and Viziers in particular). The final section provides a number of new spells and proficiencies, which vary from the average to excellent.

Two things stand out to me when I read anything written for the *Al-Qadim* setting - the overall quality of the writing, and the way the mood of the campaign setting permeates every page. You really can feel the harsh desert wind, hear the chants of the priests from the minarets, see the blue oceans lapping against rocky shores (Help! I've lapsed into the 'Thief of Baghdad'). If you like having your buckles swashed, this is for you.

The **Shaiir's Handbook** should not only interest those who use the *Al-Qadim* campaign setting, but anyone interested in playing a different type of wizard character. For those of you who are playing in the world of Zakhara, or somewhere similar, this should be considered an essential purchase. Bugger *Dark Sun*, give me more *Al-Qadim*.

FIELDS OF FIRE

Shadowrun Sourcebook
by FASA

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This latest *Shadowrun* release comes in at 110 pages of new rules, equipment and data, even briefly touching upon Australia as per the setting detailed in issues 6-9, 11 & 15 of *Realms*). **Fields of Fire** comes with a beautiful piece of cover art and is filled with typical black and white *Shadowrun* illos. It looks good, and is made warm by the expected and much welcomed *Shadowntalk*.

To summarise; the product introduces some new weapons and equipment, and is written from a mercenary's point of view. It is a sourcebook for that profession, in the same vein that Street Samurai, Deckers, Riggers and Mages have had similar works to round them out.

It is quite simply a *Survival Guide*, with an added hardware catalogue.

The book is good and its usefulness will solely depend on how much your game leans on such things as mercenaries, hot spots and combat (or equipment) heavy play. If any of these things are integral aspects of your game the book is worth a purchase, or at least a good look, otherwise view it as not necessary but still a handy reference.

An expansion for those needing a little *new fire in the belly*.

WILDSIDE

Cyberpunk Sourcebook
By R.Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Paul Mitting

Wildside focuses on the role of the Fixer in *Cyberpunk*, fixing a lack of detail in the core rules by adding extensive optional rules and ideas on what Streetdeal is as a skill, how to use it, and what it can do for your character.

The Fixer has been given a host of new roles, each with its own specialties and place on the darker side of the Street. I liked the concept of the Shoemaker best; he specialises in fake Identities and removal of unwanted ones from the Net. This section shows how the Net can and is used to keep track of people.

Other topics covered are Money and Credit, Life on the Street, Crimes, and the effects of Tech on everyday life. Age old favourites rehashed are - Drugs and Religion. I liked the Realism cult - we're all Gods who have created a seemingly real world to live in as a cure for boredom. Sound familiar?

The quality of the text in this supplement is very good, and you get true value in the various topics covered; adventure hooks leap out of every section. Where we are let down is by the art which ranges from average (the cover) to diabolical (most of the interior stuff). Game art should have narrative elements to inspire the referee - there's none of that here.

Essential reading for Fixer characters.

EARTHDAWN COMPANION

Earthdawn Sourcebook
by FASA

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

I must say I found the idea of releasing a companion so soon after the launch of the game disagreeable but FASA has, less than six months after *Earthdawn's* debut, done just that.

Firstly it is a big book, coming in at 168 pages, plus 8 pages of colour art, this at least is good value. Production is also excellent, as all *Earthdawn* products have so far been.

But, now to the contents of the book itself; it covers new ground with disciplines, talents, spells, magic items, questors, light bearers, air ship combat and devising new creatures and disciplines.

In all a lot of new information, but as one staffer here pointed out "Why wasn't it all included in the main rule book?". The only answer to that is because the rule book would have been well over 500 pages if they had. Pondering this, the most obvious thing to say in the **Companion's** defence is that it is exactly what a companion should be by definition, and on that basis it does the job well.

The **Earthdawn Companion** is a good enough product, but one that is far from being *necessary* to play the game. For those who have enjoyed *Earthdawn* and are now ready for more depth you should enjoy this release, but don't expect any surprises.

TACTICAL HANDBOOK

BattleTech Supplement
by FASA

Reviewed by Graham Holman



The **BattleTech Tactical Handbook** contains several new rules variations and additional equipment for use with the *BattleTech Compendium* and *MechWarrior Second Edition* sourcebooks. Splitting play into three levels; Basic, Tournament/Mechforce level, and Optional Advanced rules, the handbook provides many new variations for the experienced player.

The Double Blind rules, for instance, allows total hidden movement games with opponent locations only being sensed by direct sight, or sensor detection. Sensor ranges and ECM modifiers add an increased level of complexity to standard free sight gaming. Codes for setting down movements are supplied. The on drawback to this enhancement is setting down movement orders way requires a referee and three sets of maps.

The Operational Game is a mapless system for quickly generating BattleTech campaigns. This variation enables two forces to run multiple battles whilst needing to allocate resources to maintenance and reinforcements and achieving campaign objectives. With considerations such as repair, supply and the splitting of your forces into Recon, Rear Guard and Main Body the Campaign rules add variety and spice for the battle hardened BattleTech tactician.

The Level Three rules include modified Movement Sequences, Artillery variations,

Craters, Hull Down rules and many more. The new Movement Sequence fixes the unfair advantage of fast vehicles "swarming" 'Mechs whilst the Artillery rules give artillery a much expanded role. The other rules are mostly minor variations which should be chosen by personal preference.

The New Weapons section imports new advances in Inner Sphere and Clan technology. Caseless and Hyper-Velocity Autocannons, Mech Mortars and Ultra Autocannons are upgraded ballistic weapons whilst several new Missile systems are also available. Combined with Claw and Mace additions to the 'Mech armoury, there is now an increased offensive capacity to be deployed. In response we now have improved ECM capability and a Laser Anti-Missile system to add to Blazer Armour and Glazed Armour providing extra defence. Purchase your new Ablative/Flak Cooling suit and improved SLDF Neurohelmet and you're ready to fight your first Operational Campaign.

The **Tactical Handbook** is an excellent addition to the *BattleTech* system giving greater depth and playability without introducing convoluted and complicated rule changes. If you need a BattleTech challenge, go out and buy this one; but don't forget to get your referee a copy too!

KEEPER'S COMPENDIUM

Call of Cthulhu Accessory

By Chaosium

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Following Chaosium's usual style for *Call of Cthulhu* supplements, this has a clear layout coupled with good black and white illustrations. Culled from the works of H.P. Lovecraft, this tome is set in the 1920's (although the elements are easily adapted to any period) and designed to add further flesh to some of the bones provided in the main game rules.

The **Keeper's Compendium** consists of a further selection of those infamous and unpronounceable secret tomes, most providing a new spell or two to add to the investigator's armoury. Alongside these is a selection of new cults and Believer groups to spice up your scenarios. The book goes into greater detail for some of the lesser known alien races such as the Mi-Go, giving greater definition to their aims and values. The book is rounded off with some further mysterious places to hint of.

Chaosium usually provide value for money products, but this one leaves you wondering "So what?". The books are just more of the same, the cults not really detailed enough to be usable, and the alien races and mysterious places little more than a paragraph of description. The **Keeper's Compendium** is a non-essential extra that will draw some players in with its dark hints. For the fans.

FIGHTER'S CHALLENGE II

AD&D Solo Adventure

by TSR

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

I want to give you some good news; a TSR module that really works. Yup, it's true. **Fighter's Challenge II** is an excellent budget-priced, 32 page introductory adventure for a one DM, one player session. The scenario is cleverly crafted; combining all the cliches that made us all fall in love with the game when we first started - rescue a princess, travel a dark forest, explore an undead infested dungeon and win through to defeat a witch and set things to rights in the troubled kingdom.

The player character takes on the role of a chivalrous knight of 4th to 6th level and is aided throughout the adventure by a series of appreciative npcs - which in itself makes a pleasant change for some players who whine about the 'world' always being against them. Only an incompetent referee could ruin the enjoyment of a debutante player in this module. Mind you, the referee is not aided by a number of glaring errors in the module - map, key and encounter areas not matching on a number of occasions point up some sloppy final editing.

The cover art is good but uninspiring, interior layout is spacious, maps utilitarian and illustrations serviceable even if mostly seen before. An ideal adventure to open someone's eyes to the excitement and fun of AD&D.

WORMWOOD

Rifts Dimension Book One

by Palladium Books

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

From the excellent cover to the intriguing title, Palladium's first *Rifts Dimension* book promises something different. *Wormwood* is a living planet! The planet is currently encompassed by a chaotic battle between Good and Evil, and is not above taking sides. Players are strongly encouraged to take on the role of one of the good guys and try to turn the tide of battle which the baddies are currently winning.

Wormwood opens with an excerpt from a comic strip; a dozen pages of finely drawn cartoon set the scene for rest of the book. Spiky! Following on from this, we get into descriptions of character types, new spells, monsters and the like - all of these are tinged with a strong streak of originality (no doubt inspired by the comic strip). The Crawling Towers are classic, and for once even the good guys get to wear really neat, nasty looking armour. Sure stereotypes abound, and the monsters are inordinately spiky, but a product without elves! What more could you ask for? **Wormwood** has about everything - swords, sorcery, symbiotic cyberware, 'Mechs, guns and Harleys!

I like this book. The idea of a living planet combined with the evil side having the upper hand leads me to expect adventure in this unique setting will be FUN. Recommended.

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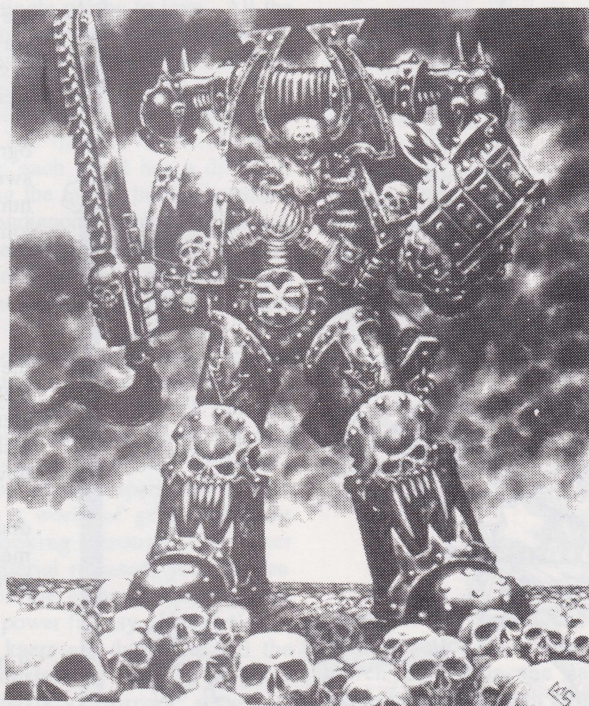
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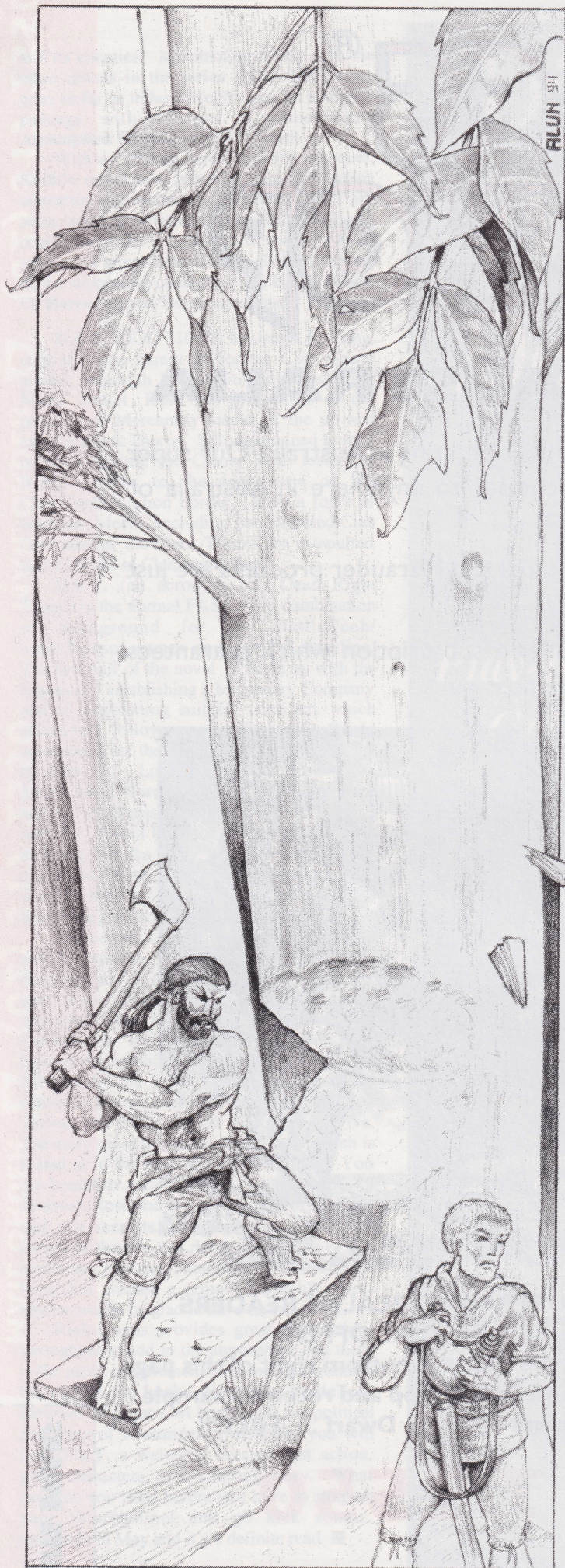
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SAMPLE TOKEN





THE GREATER GOOD

Unae Short Fiction

by Mike Dunn

"Quiet! Do you hear that?"

Kerus lowered his axe. "I hear nothing, Teph. You hear only the echoes of tavern gossip."

Teph wiped sweat from his furrowed brow. "Perhaps I imagined it. But you know as I do it is more than gossip. The ogres are less than a day from here."

"And the fort of Zeck is between us and them. The patrols would catch any bandits attempting to cross the river."

"So what of Teel and Sulo?" asked Teph. "Do you believe their raft sank, as the militia Captain claimed?"

Kerus leaned on his axe. "Does it matter what I believe? They are gone, and whether it was accident or foul play matters little. If we start fleeing from shadows, we will never meet our lumber quota. Would you see your family starve because you thought the ogres were coming for you?"

Teph shook his head ruefully. "If we die at the hands of the ogres, our families will certainly starve." He lifted his axe and swung hard at the tree they were working on, a giant spruce near a hundred feet high. Kerus paused to drink from his waterskin, then joined him. But for the sound of their blades, the forest fell silent.



The two woodcutters would have been little pleased to know they were not alone in the Ushlar Wood, a day's fast travel from Kelai. Inhuman ears heard the sound of their labours. Quiet words were exchanged in a grating language, and the listeners set off at a fast trot. They did not head toward the sound of the axemen's blades however, rather turning into the setting sun, toward the river.

Teph and Kerus sat atop the felled tree, watching the sun disappear behind the distant hills. Kerus chewed slowly on a meatstick. Nearby, their mules grazed on the leaves of the fallen birch.

"How many is that?" asked Teph, patting the thick trunk.

Kerus pulled a notched stick from inside his jerkin and studied it momentarily. "This is our twelfth."

"Do you count that one from yesterday? The one with borer bugs through it?"

Kerus shook his head. "Good only for burning. Best leave it."

Both fell silent, savouring the cool forest breeze. The tree had taken most of the day to bring down, and while both were young and fit, eight hours chopping had left them drained. Their axes, both old and soft, could barely take thirty minutes hard cutting before requiring sharpening again. It was both their hopes that the extra cash from this journey would be sufficient to buy each a new blade.

They were a long way from finished, however. They had yet to fetch their latest prize to the river, then float the whole twelve tree haul eighty leagues down-river to Kelai and the timber yards. Even then, they had yet to battle the merchant valuers to get a decent price for their goods. It was common knowledge that the valuers took bribes from the yard owners to understate the value of

the raw timber, but the woodsmen had no choice but to accept the offered price. The one attempt to collectively oppose the buyers' monopoly had been swiftly crushed, when the organisers were visited by a deputation of the city guard. Their families now lived only by the generosity of the other woodsmen.

Kerus glanced up at the sound of the mules' traces rattling. The lead animal was looking about, its ears twitching. The other three picked up its mood, shifting restlessly and pulling against their tethers. The two men exchanged looks, slid silently from their perch and picked up their axes, warily looking about.

The forest was silent. Teph silently mouthed the common prayer. He looked over to Kerus crouched nearby, listening intently, his face expressionless. The mules were becoming increasingly restless, pulling hard at their tethers. Teph moved to their sides, hoping to calm them. They settled at his touch, but their fear still showed in their wide eyes.

Minutes passed. They heard nothing but the wind, saw nothing but the trees. Kerus lowered his axe and shrugged slightly. Teph remained tense.

"You think our mules heard the tavern gossip?" asked Teph.

Kerus dismissed the sarcasm with a wave. "First you listen to rumours, now you heed the fears of animals?" He laughed. "Flee from shadows if you wish. I am going to sleep." He pulled a blanket from his travel sack and spread it on the ground. "I suggest you do the same. It will take most of tomorrow to get this trunk to the river." He lay on the rug and closed his eyes. Within minutes he was asleep.

Teph looked about the dark woods nervously. It seemed strange that he should hear no sound in a place full of life. He fought a compulsion to wake Kerus, to ensure that whatever fate was to befall him, at least he would not be alone. Only the more tangible fear of his friend's contempt restrained him. It was some time before he fetched his own blanket and drifted into a fitful sleep.



Both men woke before sunrise, as they always did. Breakfast was a frugal affair, being a handful of dried figs and some heavy black bread. Within half an hour of rising, both were fed, packed and ready to resume their labours. There were hours enough in the day to set a more leisurely pace, but it was an issue of pride to the peasant folk of Kelai to spend no time idle. The priests told them their labours were all they had to offer Kreinta, and that a minute spent idle was an insult to their creator. The priests' word was law.

Their four mules were harnessed by the time the sun rose. Teph finished banging the last of the spikes into their tree and hitched the traces to them. Kerus grabbed the lead animal by its nose ring and gave it a sharp tug. The beast brayed in protest, but obeyed, following Kerus. The rest of the team followed it. The traces went taut. The mules halted, but maintained their effort after a few cracks of Teph's stock whip. They strained against the weight of the fallen tree, their harnesses creaking. The tree shifted slightly, then slid forward as it broke free of the clinging ground. Kerus stumbled, but caught himself, stepping aside as the team picked up speed. Teph walked quickly alongside, guiding them with voice and whip. Kerus walked ahead, kicking aside branches and other debris that might impede their progress. It was only thirty minutes walk to the forest edge and the open meadows that led to the river. Though unwilling to admit it, Kerus too was well pleased to be leaving the hinterlands.

A scout watched them emerge from the forest. He growled low, glad the watching and waiting was almost over, that combat and the promised bounty was near. He observed them for a moment, then shuffled back out of sight and set off at a ponderous trot to join his brothers waiting near the river.

Kerus hesitated, watching a cluster of bushes some two hundred paces distant. For a moment, he thought he had seen something move behind them, something large. He quickly dismissed the thought, chastising himself for allowing Teph's concerns to touch him. Despite himself, he glanced back twice at the spot before it passed out of view.

The scout caught sight of his brothers, well hidden in a willow grove on the river bank. To his delight, he saw they had caught a rabbit in the snare, and were skinning it alive. Its shrill shrieks

were audible for some distance. The human stood back, watching with distaste. The scout snarled quietly, wishing they didn't need the man as they did. He rejoined the band in time to participate in the dismemberment of the unfortunate rabbit.

The woodsmen did not stop for the midday meal, pausing only once to water the tired animals at a stream before setting off once again. They had reached the gentle slope of the river plain, where the going was easier for man and beast. Their spirits were lifting at the prospect of returning home after two long weeks away.

"Teph," called Kerus, "Will you be seeing that pretty young girl when we get back this time?"

"You mean the boat builder's daughter?"

"Aye, that's the one. What's her name, Annelise?"

"Allysa, and no, I'll not be seeing her."

"Why not, for Kreinta's sake? You should be getting married by now. You reach twenty three this year, do you not?"

"I do, and I'm trying to get married. I went to Father Ulthe when we got back last time, and asked him if he would speak the blessing over our union."

"What did he say?"

"He said he would be honoured to see us joined, just as soon as her father pays the church the tithe he owes from last year."

"Surely her father can afford it? His boats are the best on the river. They fetch a fine price."

"They do that," said Teph, "But the Benefices' collectors visited him last season and demanded he pay fifty Florins tithe, or see his house burnt. They say his wealth attracts envy, and tempts others to steal."

Kerus nodded gravely. Material wealth was an evil, he knew that. More than was necessary to live and work tempted a man to sin.

"What will you do?" asked Kerus.

Teph trotted up to help Kerus steer the mules around a ditch.

"With the money from this trip and the next, I hope to pay his tithes and free her for marriage."

"A good deed, my friend. I wish you well."

They marched in silence for a while, urging the sweaty mules on with their whips. They soon found the trails they had left on earlier journeys, deep ruts in the ground where they had dragged other logs down to the riverside. The ground became slightly boggy, slowing their progress. They rested the mules more frequently, aware that they too were tired after two weeks hard work. By the time the river came into view ahead, the sun almost touched the horizon.

"You see?" said Kerus expansively, gesturing at the neatly arranged row of logs at the river's edge. "No harm has befallen us. The ogres dare not enter these plains without the leave of the Marshall at Fort Zeck. His soldiers are duty-bound to protect those who work these lands."

Teph brightened suddenly, eyes fixed on a point near the river. "By Kreinta, I believe you, Kerus. Look there!"

Kerus looked where his companion pointed. To his amazement, a figure emerged from a willow grove a hundred paces down the bank from their logpile, and only eighty from where they now stood. He wore the chain shirt and crested helm of the Porte militia, a Captain by the colour of his cape. The soldier waved and gestured for them to join him. Teph returned the wave, and charged down the grassy slope to meet him.

Kerus rolled his eyes. Teph had always idolised the soldiery. It had been a bitter disappointment to him when his father had forbidden him to enlist, demanding the boy remain at home to help keep his family. Kerus left the mule team, knowing they were unlikely to escape with a tree tied to them and followed his over-excited friend.

He took only a few steps when he stopped, suddenly suspicious. Why would a Captain be alone here, two days from Zeck? He seemed to bear no injuries. His cloak was undamaged and relatively clean. Other patrols they had met were at least ten men strong. Kerus looked to the willow grove, wondering if perhaps, for some reason, the patrol had been told to remain hidden. He peered into the shadows beneath the drooping boughs.

He saw no soldiers, but what he did see so terrified him that he whimpered aloud.

As he watched, five figures emerged from the grove. None less than nine feet tall, they were grotesquely muscular, with arms



thicker than a man's legs. Their heads were overly large, even for their great stature, and covered by a shaggy mat of black hair. Each bore an enormous axe, which they swung one handed as they ran at Teph and the soldier. Teph saw them coming, and uttered a terrified shriek, before turning and fleeing in utter panic. The soldier turned to look what had scared the woodsman. Kerus groaned with despair when he saw the monsters would easily reach him before he could run. To his amazement, the soldier did not run or even draw his blade as the beasts bore down on him, but simply watched as his demise approached.

When they simply ran past him as if he did not exist, Kerus began to doubt his eyes. Other matters took his mind from the issue as two of the creatures turned their attention to him. His mind racing, he grabbed his axe from his travel sack and fled back toward the forest.

The Captain uttered a quiet oath. His Ogre charges had emerged from hiding before he could lure the woodsmen close. Now they had to chase them down, and while he knew the taller ogres could run them down, it was a risk he would rather have avoided. He sat on the bank and amused himself tossing pebbles in the river while he waited for his inhuman soldiers to return.

Kerus slowed slightly, confident he had evaded his pursuers. The sight of the five Ogres emerging from the trees kept coming back to him. He had seen Orcs, even fought them on occasion, in the days when they used to raid Portre. But the Ogres were a different matter. The priests said they were abominations, and that a strong man with faith in Kreinta would always triumph over them, but when he had seen them swinging those four foot axes, all the sermons were forgotten in his terror. He thought of Teph, chased by three of them, and without the fifty pace head start that saved him, and prayed that his friend had the good sense to run for the trees, where the low branches would slow the tall pursuers. As he slowed to a walk and forced himself to breathe deeply, a faint scream reached him from the direction of the river. Kerus screwed his eyes shut. He had never heard a man scream like that, and prayed he never would again. Disobeying reason, he set off in the gathering darkness to find its source.

It did not take him long. The sound repeated itself several times, sometimes loud, sometimes quiet, but always terrible to hear. Kerus could hear the river by the time he located its source.

The Ogres had caught Teph. They had tied him to a tree, and were taking turns slashing at him with a long knife. His face was already a bloody ruin, and messy wounds on his torso bled freely. Blood frothed from his nose and mouth as he sobbed helplessly. One of the Ogres grabbed the knife from another, and began

carefully peeling back the skin on Teph's mutilated chest. His agonised writhing ensured the process would be anything but neat.

Enraged that a man should be treated so, but utterly terrified at the thought of sharing the same fate, Kerus crept quietly out of earshot, then cast aside his axe and ran sobbing away from the nightmare.



Daylight found him exhausted, curled up like a dog in a stream bed. He had run for most of the night, until he tumbled into the stream and stayed there, too tired to continue. Moments of sleep had come, always quickly ended by dreams of blood and knives. Covered in thin mud, he dragged himself out of the ditch and looked about. The river was a few hundred paces to his right. Ahead was a trail that led to the river, crossing it at a wide ford. Kerus rose unsteadily to his feet and set off for the ford, hoping to quench the thirst that burned his throat.

The chilly water shocked him awake. He splashed it about his body, washing away the mud and rotting leaves that clung to him, then drank deeply. His legs ached. He wondered what the Ogres would do with the mules, but quickly banished the thought as images of Teph's fate returned.

For the first time, he felt anger at what had happened. The soldiers were supposed to protect them from bandits. Father Ulthe had said himself the soldiers were the hands of Saint Baimio, doing His will on Unae. Yet the one soldier that could have helped them had completely ignored the monsters! Kerus wondered if perhaps it was Kreinta's will that Teph die a messy, undignified death, and wondered, just fleetingly if maybe the priests lied.

The sound of hoofbeats startled him. He looked around nervously, crouching low in the water. He quickly spotted the source; a party of at least ten riders approaching fast from the north. From the direction of Fort Zeck. They were soldiers! He saw the crests on their helms waving in the wind, saw their multi-hued capes streaming behind them and felt a fierce exultation. Now the beasts would feel the wrath of the God of Men!

He waved vigorously and ran out of the river toward them, shouting wildly. The riders slowed, some drawing bows as he approached. Puzzled at first, he realised that he must be a strange sight to them, an unarmed man alone in the hinterlands. When they were fifty paces distant, he slowed, walking forward and calling to them.

"Hail, soldiers! I am Kerus of Kelai, a woodsman. There are Ogres in these woods." The two lead riders, both Captains,

exchanged glances at the mention of Ogres. They allowed him to approach, but at ten paces, one of them called out.

"Halt! Come no closer. Explain your presence here."

Kerus obeyed, nervously eying the bows trained on him. "I am Kerus of Kelai, a woodsman. I have been in the Ushlar wood these past two weeks gathering lumber with my friend..." He choked at the thought of his lost companion. The two officers looked at him expectantly. One of them leaned over to the other, whispered something to him. Kerus glanced at the officer, then looked again curiously.

While he could not be certain, the young Captain looked like the man he saw the previous day. The one who the Ogres had ignored.

The older officer interrupted his thoughts. "Speak on, Kerus of Kelai. What happened to you?"

Kerus stumbled on. "We, uh, we were bringing back our last tree to the river. We make rafts of them and float them back to town when we..."

"I do not care for the details of your trade, woodsman," snapped the officer. "What of these Ogres?"

"We were attacked, Lord. Five of them came from the trees. They killed my friend. And he was there and he did not help us!" Kerus waved an accusing fist at the other Captain, who stared back unmoved.

The older officer stroked absently at his mount's mane.

"Tell me Kerus of Kelai, are you a man of Kreinta?" he asked.

"Yes, lord. I call at the chapel weekly, I pray daily, and I pay my tithes."

"Good. Do you believe in the words of Saint Baimio? The greatest good for the greatest number?"

"Of course, Lord. It is one of the first lessons of our childhood readings. Father Ulthe says..."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the officer. "I assume that a pious man like yourself would do whatever is necessary to keep these beasts from your temples? From your families?"

"Anything Lord. I would gladly die to see them kept from my door!"

"Excellent, excellent. Now, can you understand that the task of keeping them from your doors is not easy for the soldiery of Zeck, that occasionally we must compromise our principles, for the common good?"

"Yes, Lord," answered Kerus uncertainly. He had no idea what the officer was trying to say, but felt a growing certainty that it was not what he wanted to hear. The older Captain turned to his fellow officer. "Is the lumber secure?" The younger man nodded curtly.

"They have horses nearby to haul it. It will be gone by dusk."

Kerus stared in disbelief. "You would let them take my logs? There is two weeks hard labour there!" Then the full meaning of the officer's words dawned on him. "You knew! You wanted them to take my logs!" Fists clenched, he advanced angrily on the younger captain, whose hand drifted to his sword.

"You led them to us. We trusted you to protect us, and you helped them kill my friend! Why?" Eyes ablaze he shouted the question.

The young officer shrugged slightly. "For the common good, of course." He glanced back at the bowmen.

"Kill him."

Six crossbows fired. Kerus died before he hit the ground. His last thought was of his village priest, smiling benignly and promising better things in the next world for the faithful.

Captain Khura turned to the younger officer. "Careless work, Demus. Had we not stumbled across him, he may have exposed us."

Demus toyed with his mount's reins. "The Ogres are difficult to restrain. Even if we were discovered, it would matter little. Half the gold the Ogres give us for the lumber goes to the priests. Were we discovered, they would protect us for the sake of the money."

"True enough," mused Khura. "They pacified the peasants fears over the last two woodsmen with a tale of a raft accident, I believe."

"Indeed," said Demus with a faint smile. "Kreinta is a powerful ally to the faithful."



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OSSARD

City of Cold Silence:

A letter from High King Caemarou, *via* Forwao, to the Holy Benefice of the Church of Baimiopia

Most Holy Benefice Verrocchio, Servant of Krienta and Mortal Head of the Church of Baimiopia.

I, Forwao, Courtier of Wair-Rae bid you heed this urgent message.

I have just returned from the Heletian League city-state of Ossard and have been instructed by High King Caemarou, Lord of Wair-Rae, to repeat to you what I have revealed to him. Following these observations I have been instructed to convey a grave message from my King.

Firstly I will tell the tale of my travels:

I arrived in Ossard only days after an unseasonal squall had thrashed the port city at the start of summer, still the sky was dark and the city glum and damp. I could feel something strange in the city, my sense for the magical telling me that the place was now changed from what it had once been. My passage was by an Evoran ship, which upon arrival had port officials questioning the captain. Being merely a passenger they let me leave and enter their city.

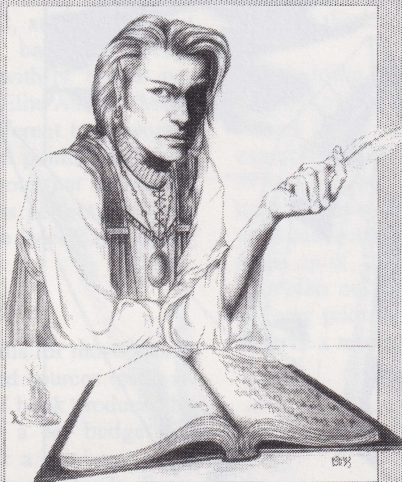
We had arrived shortly after sunrise, and while I could hear the bustle of the streets there was not a person to be seen. The roads were deserted and a cold wind blew down the empty avenues. I became aware that something very powerful was at work in Ossard. I could sense that the entire city was a focus, the biggest vortex of *divine magic* I have yet encountered.

The city had been *marked*.

With that realisation I clutched at my medallion to *Adlien* and slowly continued on my way. The next corner I faced brought with it an impossibly crowded street. Looking behind me from where I had come, instead of the road being empty it was now bursting with life. Somehow I had pierced the shell of the city. So, now I trod its disconcerting streets which were truly filled with vibrant life. The people I passed paid no heed to my pointed ears, many of them seemed drunk and others on heat, all were uncontrollable. Nearly all I passed wore proudly and openly the symbol of one of a dozen different kults.

Corruption walked the streets.

I progressed towards the centre of the city from which issued chanting, broken by loud and regular cheers. As I travelled I passed followers of rival kults who stood



side by side in some cases and tore each others throats out in others. There was no law, there was no order.

It took me hours to force my way through the crowds to the even more packed market square. Nearby stood the Cathedral of the Church of Baimiopia but no longer did it tower strong, as an icon for the city's people. It was a burnt out blackened shell and stains of dried blood marked its front steps. As I passed I felt the unresting souls of its now dead priests watching me from within.

As I neared the far end of the square, where the cheering was strongest I had to dodge scurrying children, filthy creatures with wild looks in their eyes. They fought over stones which once claimed they hurled at the Lord's residence. Soon I realised that their target was not the residence but a form hanging limply from a balcony, the partly burnt and beaten body of your own servant; Benefice Gian Vassini. To my complete horror I realised that his body, slick with his own red blood twitched, then moved. The Benefice was still alive! No doubt kept so only to suffer the terrible pain that must surely wrack his broken form. The crowd cheered with each stone that struck. One man, in a dirty militia uniform, fired arrows at his target. I stepped below the body and dragged my fingers through the pool of congealed blood beneath him, as did several city-folk. These others then licked

their bloodied fingers, feeding like crazed animals. I turned to go. The city was cursed, the people in it lost. It was now a place of perversion. As I left the square I rubbed my bloodied finger tips together and willed Benefice Vassini to Death's waiting embrace. The magic flowed through me and I heard a disappointed sigh rise from the crowd behind me. It was the least I could do.

When I returned to the docks I found myself again passing through deserted streets. The ship had its sails down, but strung from its masts were the crew, including the captain. As night grew near I felt watched, carefully I hid myself. When night claimed the city I fled in a small but trustworthy boat.

I bid you Your Holiness, be assured the rumours you hear are true. Please hasten your action before the citizens souls are lost and the delicate balance between your League and my nation is broken. This brings me to the second part of my letter and perhaps the more frightening aspect of these darkening times. High King Caemarou commanded me to convey this brief message to you:

The High Throne of the Pillar Cities of Wair-Rae will not allow servants of corruption to gain hold upon an entire city, be it in Wair-Rae or the Heletian League itself. If necessary Wair-Rae will lay waste any such city, regardless of where it might be, or who may dwell there. Consider that if Ossard is not redeemed by the end of Winter in the new year of your Lord Krienta 515EK, six months hence, war will come to Dormetia.

- High King Caemarou, Lord of Wair-Rae and all her colonies 514EK/1863FW

* * *

The Holy Benefice Verrocchio, hands trembling, called hoarsely for his assistant.

"I want a full third of the Inquisition assembled now! And find their head, Benefice Vincenzo!"

"But your Holiness, it is so late?"

"You defy me? Send for them now! And summon King Giovanni personally! As for Ossard, the flame of salvation is kindled!"

It is 514 EK, it is late summer ◉

FROM THE REALMS CAMPAIGN WORLD OF UNAE

GARGOYLE HIVES



Most fear the gargoyles. Of them it has been said that few other 'nations' have the power to obliterate an enemy as thoroughly. It is perhaps fortunate for all in Dormetia that the Spirit Queen of the Troiths only rarely chooses foes.

Instead of focusing her energies on conquest she spends all of her resources on other, hidden goals. Watch the gargoyles I say, watch them for they are at work!

-Forwao, Elven Charlatan

THE GARGOYLE TROITHS

To most scholars of Dormetia the gargoyles of Kalraith are a mystery. Eye witness accounts of their cities are very rare; it can be said with confidence that no outsider has seen all six *Troiths* (city-hives) and lived to tell the tale. This includes even Forwao, the renowned and well travelled elven charlatan of Wair-Rae.

But, what is known? Where do the gargoyles come from? The source for much of the information printed here is Forwao:

It is said by the elves of Wair-Rae that the gargoyles are scavengers living in the ruins of an old, forgotten civilisation. Other races offer no alternatives, apart from the dwarves of the *Citadels* in northern Wairanir who claim all sorts of ludicrous things.

While little is known of the lost nation whose cities now belong to the *Spirit Queen*, what can be taken as truth was their impressive level of civilisation. Their ruins spread for miles, with most buildings being made of stone, even the roads linking the ruined cities remain largely intact. Truly, the civilisation must have suffered a great and sudden fall to have died so completely, not even leaving legends to survive it.

Where once market squares must have teemed with commerce and streets crawled with traffic now all is idle. Well nearly...

Each of the ruined cities is now home to a troith, or as some call them; a hive-city. From each city's central square now climbs a jagged dark tower made of the very weathered stone and warped wood of the dead ruins. These towers reach over a hundred yards into the air and are surrounded by a dark halo caused by the swarming bodies of hundreds of gargoyle residents. Unlike the soaring heights of the hives the base of a troith bloats to over twenty yards wide and is seemingly abandoned to be filled by foul waste. A troith is a warren crawling with the hunched forms of the gargoyles, a place of darkness and stench, a city of nightmares.

Each of the troiths houses a population of around five thousand, the Spirit Queen's hive is largest with over nine thousand gargoyles. New rumours tell of a host of vermin like scavengers that dwells below the troiths, fanning through the ruin's sewers. Not of gargoyles, but of something worse.

THE ANATOMY OF A GARGOYLE

Gargoyles are living creatures that operate best when part of a group. They are not like insects but seem to have something

akin to a 'hive' culture. One thing that definitely brings them together is the will of the Spirit Queen, whether that is the norm, or a freak of nature remains to be seen.

The average gargoyle is five feet tall, with a wing span of seven feet. Their leathery skin and wings are stone grey, which has given rise to the myth that they are actually made of stone. This is completely false; they will bleed as easily as you or I. Most sport no hair, but some females have been known to have a head to tail mane of red hair, it is widely thought that this is a sign of a shaman, the priestess' of the Spirit Queen.

THE TROITHS TODAY

The six hive-cities are found in the area known only by the title of "the Ruins". Typically a troith houses thousands and is controlled by a local leader who is loyal to the Spirit Queen. It seems that such leaders are old Shamans, and on that basis we assume that these places are ruled by the wisest gargoyle residents. Several other settlements have been located in Kalraith but they appear only to be small seasonal nests, usually established in cave systems. Such settlements are home to only a few hundred gargoyles and their true purpose can only be guessed at. Rarely, a gargoyle will be expelled from the hive and travel far. Fortunately these outcasts don't survive long without the help of their hivemates. Such an individual appeared in Vangre last summer (see *Vangre Below* issue 12).

THE SIX AND THEIR HIVE NAMES

While next to nothing is known of the hive-cities themselves, what knowledge we do claim is owed to Forwao and a small handful of adventurers who have survived travels which took them within the diseased lower levels of a troith. The summarised observations are listed below:

- The troiths are called (in order of largest population to smallest) Quersic Quor, Turthic, Raken, Bredorac, Bareth and Kalmoorth.

- The safest way to approach a troith is via the ruined city's sewers (if still intact), by using the ruined buildings as cover, or by using a tree-canopy for shelter if possible (gargoyles can't fly under most native forest canopies in the area).

- Approaching a troith is nearly always fatal as they are defended very aggressively; only attempt this during the brightest part of the day and only within good cover (such as natural canopy or via sewers).

- The filthy lower levels of a troith can be accessed briefly as they are never occupied, but a trespasser's scent will only take minutes to be noticed by the gargoyles above and the swarm will be upon you.

- Most troiths are hollow at the centre producing a cavity from the ground to usually about half its height. The sides of this chamber are bedecked with perches upon which the gargoyles shelter and groom

themselves, and breed. This central chamber also extends below the market squares into the ruins' sewer system. This low area is full of wastes that are dropped from above. Scavengers remove the waste, feeding upon it and using it for other obscene rituals. Scavengers are a race unto themselves and will be dealt with later,

- Because of the scavengers the sewers can be as dangerous as the troith above.

THE SPIRIT QUEEN

While nothing is known for certain about the figure that we have come to call the Spirit Queen it is thought that she was once a gargoyle, but has since changed. Several sources indicate that this is a normal part of the gargoyle life cycle. But full details of where the cycle begins and ends is unknown. What is generally agreed among interested parties and scholars is that most gargoyles never advance to that stage of their life cycle, whether this is due to short life expectancies, or something as simple as

*"...the dwarves of the
Citadels of northern
Wairanir claim all
sorts of ludicrous
things."*

- Forwao, Elven Charlatan

a cool climate and poor nutrition is again unknown.

The Spirit Queen is the only one of her kind, some say she is the pinnacle of the gargoyles' speculated metamorphosis. Others say she is something much more disturbing. In fact, the trusted group of Cabalists based in Portre of the Kramer Confederation known as 'The Quorum' (issue 11) claim that the Spirit Queen is a diabolical force. It is their stated belief that she is the only current *divine incarnation* on the surface of Unae, thus explaining the recent fluctuations in the flow of *divine magic*. Such

disturbances in Dormetia of late have been attributed to causing the corruption of Ossard (see issues 17, 18 & 19) and the falling of *Mortigi's Curse* on Porto Baimio.

THE NEW BREED

One of the reasons the theory of a life cycle involving metamorphosis is connected to the gargoyles of Kalraith is due to the *rumour* of a half-breed race that has appeared in the east of that island. Once again this has not been confirmed.

What this *New Breed* is described as, is a more intelligent and perhaps human gargoyle. They are said to be winged but have olive skin and human features such as no horn and a crown of usually dark hair. They walk upright and have initiative which marks them as separate from their apparent kin, the gargoyles.

Whether any of this is true cannot be confirmed without visiting the region. Who would take heed of such nonsense?

Currently several scholars are seeking adventurers that are willing to travel into the Ruins and verify the many fantastic stories that have of late spilled forth from that land. Eventually this research will be collated and revealed when it has been verified and is known to contain only truth.

THE DIVINE FOCUS

What is known for certain is that the gargoyles always have, and indeed do now pose a very real threat to their neighbours. The Spirit Queen is a powerful force, commanding her swarms to leave her troiths and attack in incredible numbers, decimating her targets (see issue 16 - Fletland).

The Ruins hide many secrets, most dark, some unmentionable and many more still unknown. But this time of mystery is fading. It would seem that those who say that something special or even *spiritual* is happening to Fletland's north may be correct, for are not all the churches active nearby, and as a mark of the foci's power does not Ossard's future balance on a knife edge?

By Colin Taber and Adam Whitt.

The year is 514 EK, it is late summer ☉



Falkenstein Competition

In issue 15 **Australian Realms** and **R.Talsorian Games** offered a whole swag of prizes to anyone who could answer our 19th Century quiz. Here are the **Winners...** but first the answers supplied by Lisa Pondsmith to the Steampunk trivia questions:

THE ANSWERS

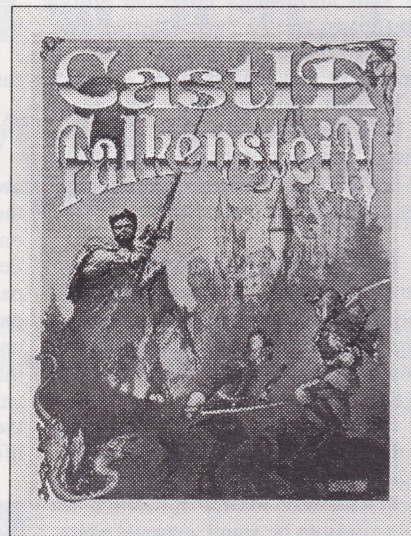
1. Neuschwanstein, Herrenchiemsee, Linderhof.
2. The closing of parliament.
3. The Albatross
4. The Waltz
5. Mime
6. Princess Victoria
7. Charles Worth of Paris

THE WINNERS

First Prize: Jason P. Prince of Bilgola Plateau NSW. Jason not only got the most correct answers, but his entry was also the best presented, complete with wax seal! Congratulations Jason, a hardback copy of *Castle Falkenstein* and some *Soldiers & Swords* miniatures will soon be on their way out to you.

2nd to 5th: Softbound copies of *Castle Falkenstein* go out to - Garry Fay, VIC; Alan Michell, SA; Patrick J. Williamson, NSW; Angela Shearer, WA.

6th to 10th: Packs of *Soldiers and Swords* miniatures will be sent to Jason Chaplin, WA; Jonathon Underwood, VIC; Gail Warden, QLD; Peter Wallis, NSW; Helmut Kratz, WA.



Congratulations to all the winners and thanks to everyone for entering.

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Doom and Deeds of Glory

Hints and tips for the Elric! dark fantasy roleplaying game
by Richard Watts



THE YOUNG KINGDOM'S have but a few short years to live. The crimson-eyed albino anti-hero of Michael Moorcock's *Elric Saga* lays waste to the world as he wanders it, an accidentally destructive tourist. Within a short pace of time, those nations left untouched by Elric himself will be consumed by the tide of Chaos. In such a setting, what is the attraction of role-playing? Why create a character only to see her dissolved by the Dukes of Entropy?

CHAOSIUM's ELRIC! role-playing game is one of dark fantasy. It is one of a conjectured trio of games, which will feature heroic role-playing in the five planes of *Corum!*, and post-apocalyptic science fantasy of *Hawkmoon!*. *Elric!* is a game of madness and despair. IT is set in a world haunted by the past and cowed by the threat of the future. In the Young Kingdoms, everyone is a potential hero, with the chance to carve out a name for themselves before all is forgotten. In the face of their looming doom, the Young Kingdoms need all the heroes they can get.

Characters in *Elric!* can be dreaming, drug-addicted sorcerers from prehuman Melniboné, or fat merchants from cities little better than cesspools of crime; cantankerous priests serving forgotten gods; mighty warriors, sailors, thieves. Adventurers can be from life's highest echelons, or the lowest sewers. All are united by the knowledge that they serve only themselves, although some delude themselves otherwise.

In *Elric!*, everyone is self-serving. What matter such details as honour or nationalism, when in less than ten years the entire world will be one seething, shapeless seas? Law and Chaos be damned; greed and self-aggrandisement are the true gods of *Elric!*

For the referee, the challenge of making such a world attractive, not to mention enjoyable and dramatically satisfying for the players, is greater than in most fantasy games. The reward of a satisfying campaign is correspondingly high.

ELRIC! REQUIRE's referees with keen minds. Not only must you balance the players' freedom with the direction of your plot, you must also ensure that the game's overall mood and atmosphere are dark without being claustrophobic. *Elric!* should never be totally without light. No game can be grim forever; even the most patient of players will grow bored with a menu of never-ending hopelessness. *Elric!* is not *Call of Cthulhu*. The characters should have hope. Sometimes, they should even win. Let them re-unite sundered lovers, or banish foul demons, or drag back entire nations from one another's throats. Such temporary victories only highlight the horror to come.

Humour can be a useful tool on such occasions. The scenario, "The Sojourner's Guide", in the *Elric!* supplement *Melnibone: Dragon Isle and Dreaming City* is a perfect example of such. It contrasts the mystery and haunting nature of Melnibone with caustic wit and sarcasm, highlighting the darkness thereby. Humour can be black or satirical; it need not always be of the thigh-slapping kind. A campaign in which the characters learn all too well that mortal existence is an unkind joke played upon them by the gods might have moments of merriment and mirth, but would conform to the game's melancholy theme.

THE ELRIC SAGA is driven by Elric's deeds. Similarly, an *Elric!* campaign should be driven by the characters. Such a style of gaming can prove difficult even to the most experienced referee, but is well worth the effort. If in the past you have only run pre-published adventures, fitting your adventurers into them, try it the other way round. Mould an adventure around the adventurers.

When the players first generate their characters, take notes on their background with a mind to the future events. Does one player create a character who is the last of his tribe, having seen all his family, in grand fantasy style, slaughtered and enslaved? Then after suitable wandering, allow him to discover a family heirloom in a distant land, and hear that it was sold by a man or woman bearing just such a tattoo as the adventurer's own...

Be prepared to make things up as you go along. Perhaps the characters suddenly decide to leave town when an adventure hots up around them. Sure, you can have the local militia prevent them from going, but how much more satisfying for the players to *let* them leave? You can always insert another reference to the old adventure in a new town, or even grit your teeth and throw it away, coming up with an entirely new scenario to suit whatever destination it is the character's have in mind.

ALTHOUGH THE PLAYER CHARACTERS are the heroes of the story you run, do not forget the supporting cast. Introduce NPC's carefully. Give them well-rounded personalities, and eventful lives which progress even when the characters are not around. How much more interesting for the faithful sidekick to fall in love the next time the characters are off on a quest, rather than leave his life on hold until they return. When next the adventurers sally forth, said wife may have had a baby, or two babies or even died. It is such incidental background detail which lends flavour to a campaign.

When you do add supporting characters to your *Elric!* campaign, try not to kill them off too often, tempting as it may seem. If the adventurers are forever encountering individuals doomed to some nightmarish fate, they will soon cease to care about the plight of their acquaintances at all. "Oh," they will say, as you cunningly intertwine the life of some tragic individual into the adventure, already planning a spectacular demise for him in some months to come, "It's another doomed hero. Why don't we sit back and watch what happens this time, instead of getting involved? He's sure to die hideously regardless of what we do."



GUSTAF

Such attitudes are anathema to *Elric!*. If the characters do not care about the fate of those around them, how will they care about the death of the world? Ensure that the characters remain emotionally involved with the game by playing along with what they want, rather than forcing things unexpectedly upon them. Does one player seem to desire lands and titles for her character? Then give them to her, only to have famine sweep the land some time later, and mothers with dying babes cradled in their arms begging at her door. Another character is being played as a Don Juan? Then let him have lovers in every town, but put some detail into their backgrounds, so that when next he comes swaggering into the tavern where one works, you know how she will respond. As such members of the supporting cast become more real, both to you and the players, new possibilities for plots and scenarios will open up in your game, inspired by the non-player characters in their lives.

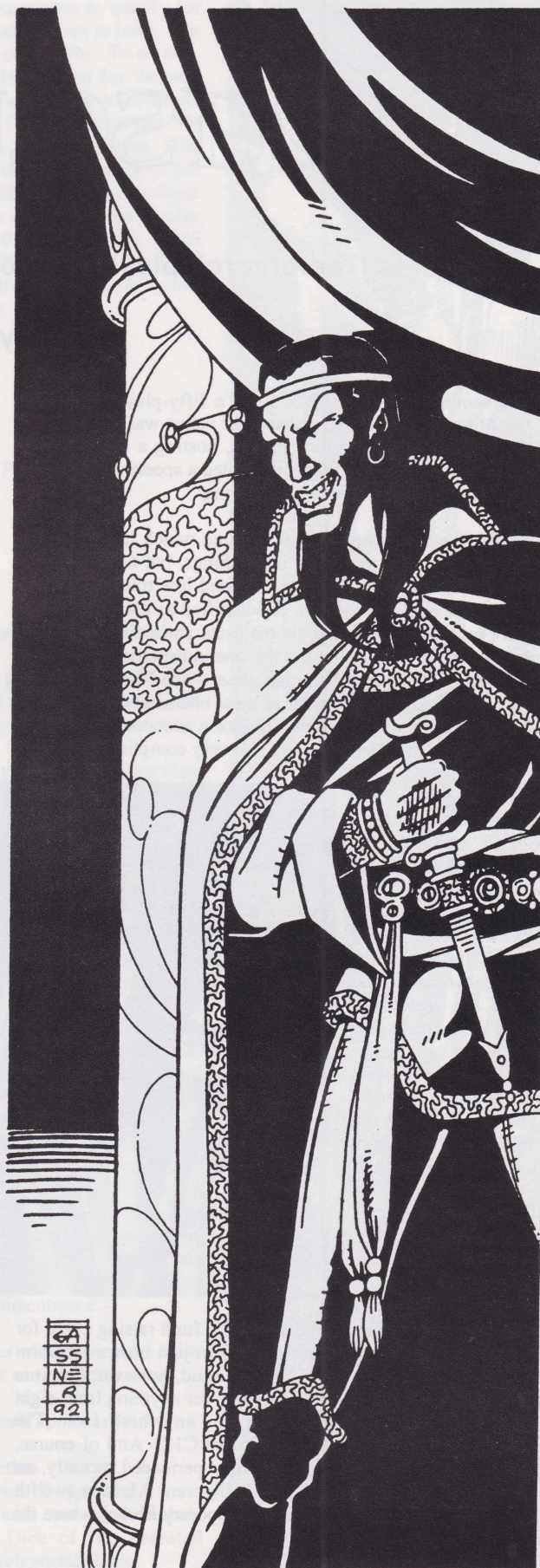
AS *ELRIC! IS A FANTASY GAME*, it should include a fair amount of heroic adventure; the discovery of lost cities, sword-swinging and treasure finding, curses, battle and bold, or treacherous deeds. Such events should still be influenced by the game's dark flavour; lost cities might collapse due to the adventurers' arrival, their delicate status quo upset by the intervention of strangers. Swords are two-edged weapons, capable of killing friends as well as enemies, as Elric himself discovers only too well. Treasure is often cursed, and its discovery may bring to the surface all manner of past horrors. Finding the burial mound of an ancient king is all very well, but what if the adventurers release its equally ancient guardian upon the lands about them?

Such happy events aside, the referee should remember that, first and foremost, *Elric!* is a game of darkness and cosmic angst. No matter what the characters do, Chaos will consume the world. (Unless of course you decide to run a radically different version of the *Elric!* game, in which the future is not predetermined, and by strength of will and mighty deeds the characters can avert the planet's destruction. Bloody optimist. If that's what you want, go for it. That's the great thing about role-playing campaigns; literally anything is possible).

Characters should foil the plots of gods, but they should also see their loved ones die. They themselves should be caught up in the entanglements of Fate, able to see their personal doom approaching but unable to avoid it. The Norse sagas, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, and the Greek legend of Oedipus all contain such elements of tragedy as are suitable to an *Elric!* campaign. Learn from the masters, and rework their tales for your modern, role-playing audience.

THE PASSING OF TIME is an important part of the sense of doom in *Elric!*. With each month the adventurers spend training, the end of the world creeps ever closer. Give them visions, portents and omens of what is to come. Allow them access to mouldering tomes of prophecy, and let the adventurers then play through and live out what they have read. The Young Kingdoms are not static. As the Elric Saga progresses, kings are born and die, new advances in science are made, nations rise and fall. This element of change should be emphasised in your game, so that the characters can feel that they are part of a living world.

It is the nature of beauty, and the attraction, that it is transient. So too is any campaign, and sooner or later your's must end, and presumably, the world along with it. But if your game has been rewarding, rich, dramatic and inspirational, its death will be greeted, not with disappointment, but with satisfaction. And hey, if the players are depressed about the possibility of their much-loved characters melting into a bloody puddle of slime, they can always try to make it to Tanelorn.



The MASQUERADE

What is freeform roleplaying? How does it work? Read this report...

by Kyla Ward

On the fourteenth of August, 1993, I ran a fifty-player freeform, entitled *The Masquerade*. For six hours, our venue was transformed into a palace in eighteenth century France, hosting a masked ball. For six hours, gamemasters and players created a spectacle to remind me yet again why I like this style of roleplaying.

A freeform, as the name suggests, is a game which has a setting, characters and an adventure; all the usual things, but no system. A freeform sits somewhere between tabletop and live roleplaying; but due to the forms it tends to take can be identified as it's own type of game. There may be rules, to handle the usual antisocial things like killing people and casting spells; but the one indispensable piece of freeform equipment is the character sheet. The action of any freeform is people taking on the roles of these characters in an almost theatrical way. Bearing this in mind, freeform anecdotes tend to be extended description of what took place and very complicated!

In some way or other, you have heard of freeforming. The popular commercial versions are the *How to Host a Murder* games. White Wolf have also recently released their "live" variation of the popular *Vampire: The Masquerade* game. But the style has been around in Australia for years, and as far as I have been able to research was generated here independently. The first freeform on record was run at Octocon in 1981. Freeforming has become very popular at Australian gaming conventions, because of the number of players it can cater for.



The Masquerade was run independently, as a fund raising event for charity. The best way I can think to explain just how a freeform works, is to use it as an example. Bear in mind, however, that it is only one example. Freeforms can be written for anything from eight players to a hundred. They can be run anywhere from The Masquerade's manor house to Science Room C12. And of course, they can be set anywhere from, as I have experienced recently, an orbital satellite under the control of a belligerent AI, to a twelfth century Welsh banqueting hall, or a contemporary library where the clerk is trying to summon Azathoth.

The Masquerade was an excursion into decadent and romantic French Gothic. It was inspired by the world of *Dangerous Liaisons* and the

works of Alexander Dumas. So what would you expect to encounter? All characters were, to some extent, involved with the unsolved murder of the Duc de Champiellles who had died a year ago, this very night. But then there were the Ambassadors, competing to win French support for a continental war; we had the Smugglers, the Purloined Letters and a number of Missing Heirs - some of whom had very good reasons to be missing. There was the Unmarried Heiress with an Unscrupulous Guardian, the Curse of the Paris Opera and of course the Vampires, who were not responsible for as much of the above as you might think.

All roleplaying games to some extent are creatures of genre. But in a freeform it is particularly important as your best cue to how to act. If someone has spoiled one of your plans, how do you get even? What if someone insults you? In *The Masquerade*, you call them a fop and a cur and demand the satisfaction of a duel - and your opponent will know how to react. You will find yourself in the middle of the room playing out the scene; you can *not* be shy in a freeform!

Freeforms work by expectations. The constraint is that some genres and situations - mass battles, cyberpunk fire fights etc. - cannot be handled this way. Most freeforms are thus based on situations like balls and dinners parties, or alien peace conferences, or being trapped in a church overnight. Not exciting enough? With hoards of ghouls howling outside and scratching at the windows? More on this when I talk about atmosphere.

When you receive a character sheet for a freeform, you should note certain things and this goes double when you write one. Firstly, who the character is and who they know; this may sound commonplace, but I once played half a game before realising that there were three other claimants to the throne. The first half-hour of freeforms inevitably consists of people wandering around finding their relatives, superiors, arch-enemies; a device I put into *The Masquerade* was a formal presentation of all guests to the Hostess at the start of the evening.

Secondly, note what the character is doing. Every character should have enough "objectives" to keep them busy; that is, they should be tied into several subplots so that they inevitably will meet other players and have to deal with the situations that arise.

Objectives should be achievable, affect the game as they are achieved, and be relevant to the character. These criteria do make some types of character difficult to write, such as the naive young innocent and the psychotic maniac. But if they are not well-written they will turn out dreadfully boring to play.

The third thing is what items the character may have; objects, money and information and gossip, things that can be exchanged. Objects may be mentioned on the character sheet or represented, by a piece of paper or some actual simulcra. All this information, together, creates the freeform world.

Then you start playing. It's about this point that the anecdotes begin. They usually sound pretty much like; "Well, first of all it said on my character sheet that I was a member of this secret society and I knew some of the other members, but there was this Comtesse who kept walking by making the secret sign, so I went up to her and started talking about it but later I saw her talking with the Duc, who I knew was trying to wipe us out; so I told the others and the Visconte said he knew this opera singer who worked as an assassin, but then we met a doctor who said she was actually a vampire and..."!

That is pretty much how a freeform runs; and the more you interact with the other characters the more you learn of the big picture that the writer has created, and the more you know the more you can do to achieve the objectives set for your persona. It's like most things in life really, the more you put in the more you get out of it.

To ensure the event runs smoothly without disruptive disputes, delays or grievances there will always be a gamemaster or masters on hand. These hardworking people often have a persona to play but are also there to handle whatever rules that have been set, and to provide background information and clarification as needed. In a freeform where some characters have been allocated abilities such as "pick pockets" or "read minds", a gamemaster is clearly required to mediate, or roll the dice or whatever. You can invent or adapt whatever rules you decide you need, and use any number of ways to resolve events that need a random or competitive element - roll dice, draw straws, the play scissors/rock/paper game, sing a nursery rhyme anything so long as it is fair and doesn't detract from the overall flavour of the game. When we staged *The Masquerade*, because of the swashbuckling background and the objectives set we expected duels to be fought so we borrowed the combat rules from YSEDA Live Roleplaying along with the safe rubber swords and daggers. The gamemaster, in this case, acted as combat referees.

A good freeform is one which runs smoothly, and manages to generate an atmosphere. That is what you are playing or writing for; that is what you want. Good writing and good roleplaying will achieve this, but there are things that help. Staging for one; this is why *The Masquerade* was held in a manor house, and why full costume was compulsory. The Masquerade also spread over several rooms; though not the entire house. This would have made it impossible to regulate and taken the event into the realms of live roleplay. But having rooms where the conspirators could withdraw from public sight assisted things greatly.

To ensure the evening flowed and players did not lose track of their objectives I added some staged sequences set to take place at preset times during the freeform. And to add excitement we also arranged some simple but effective special effects. We had several horribly made-up dead bodies that Something was responsible for, for people to discover, and a big surprise for everyone at midnight.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and challenging features of a freeform event is that you cannot leave your villains and your monsters as ciphers - they have to be playable, characters. Sometimes it is better to allocate these positions to people you know have some experience and are definitely going to do the job right. One final thing I think is very important and always like to do is to stage a climax. This overcomes a common problem in freeforms in that the end-point is often arbitrary, dictated by time or lack of resources; in any case unsatisfying. A good method is write an end point into the game from the start, for example a bomb set to explode in three hours, nightfall or dawn, or on one memorable occasion the



arrival of Darth Vader. (See? You can write a freeform about *anything* - with due respect for copyright).

This article can in no way fully describe how to write a freeform game, or do more than hint at the thousands of possible permutations. The only way to learn about this wonderful entertainment is to experience and experiment. Pre-written freeforms are difficult to find, although commercially available ones are just beginning to appear from White Wolf and Chaosium. If you prefer something that is written in Australia and has been play-tested some organisations such as ARIEL keep libraries of scenarios which include freeforms and which are accessible by members. If you would like to play in one before taking the plunge and writing and/or staging a freeform then you'll find freeforms are popular at Australian Conventions - it is a rare Con that will not feature at least one - and some gaming clubs have been known to stage games off the Convention circuit.

Freeform gaming seems to have a very wide appeal. Where tabletop roleplaying games are often described as being communally produced novels or stories, ideally a freeform game is a communally produced play or movie. Because of this it is a style of roleplaying that non-gamers tend to find easiest to understand. There have even been examples of freeforms being run for educational purposes when set in a particular historical period or at a particular event. I had regular roleplayers bringing relatives and friends to *The Masquerade*, "to see what it was all about".

There is a concern within gaming that freeforming is counterproductive to the industry because you don't need to buy the products of the games companies to enjoy a freeform game. This may or may not be the case, but at least some of the game companies have begun to recognise the format by developing their own products, and my experience is that freeforming does serve as a good introduction to gaming, as well as being an interesting and adaptable style in it's own right. Try it. You may surprise yourself.

RUNNING WITH AN EDGE

Merits and Flaws in Shadowrun

by Alan Michell

Introduction

With so many good role playing games on the market today, game masters should feel free to combine elements of different systems to improve their campaigns. With this simple idea in mind, this article seeks to take the *merits* and *flaws* characteristics from **White Wolf's Storyteller** system and modify them for **FASA's Shadowrun 2nd Edition**. This list is not meant to be all inclusive, but shows what can be done with a little thought and work. I recommend that referee's should develop their own merits and flaws, and convert others from the Storyteller products.

Gaining Merits and Flaws

During character creation for Shadowrun, merits and flaws can be bought using the number of *skill* points normally available to the character. For every two points of skill one point of merits may be taken. For every point of flaws taken two skill points are gained. Merits and flaws can be taken point for point without involving skill points so long as the character has as many compensating points of flaws to balance the points of merits taken. Certain merits and flaws counteract each other and the referee should take appropriate measures to maintain internal game logic. Any merits and flaws that are added to the game are the province of the referee who should veto any of what follows if he or she feels it would adversely affect game balance and flavour.

Aptitudes

Born Decker (1pt merit): the character has a great sense for the Matrix environment and can act faster and with more precision when decking. A heightened awareness in the virtual environment makes for a better ability to execute functions from the cyberdeck. The character gains two on their Hacking Pool.

Born Rigger (1pt merit): a born rigger has a high aptitude for moving and manoeuvring vehicles at speed. The rigger instinctively knows the limitations of their vehicle and the possible weaknesses of others. The character gains two on the Control Pool.

Cool Under Fire (1pt merit): character has a special talent for keeping a cool head in combat and maintaining their concentration on the job at hand. Gains two on their Combat Pool.

General Knowledge/Trivia Buff/Know-All (2pt merit): due to education, reading and mnemonic ability the character has a wide general knowledge. This allows the character two dice in every knowledge skill, but target numbers are slightly higher (+2). If the character spends Karma building up a knowledge skill they must build from scratch as they do not have actual points in that skill.

Jack-of-all-Trades (2pt merit): the character has some knowledge of Build and Repair in any other skills that they have where appropriate; ie if the player has a Firearms skill she also has this merit's Build and Repair ability in Firearms. This allows her to Build and Repair without the +2 penalty to target numbers for not acquiring the actual Build and Repair skill. This penalty is normally inflicted on the target numbers, as part of the Skill Web, but the character knows more about his weapons/vehicles/computers than the general users, enough to give them the skill to work on the items without penalty.

Other ideas to explore and design are Merits - Daredevil, Linguist; Flaws - Illiterate, Inept, Uneducated, Unskilled.

Physical

Allergic (1-2pt flaw): the character has an allergy that can affect them, similar to racial allergies. This allergy can, however, be different and to a level determined by the player and referee. It may be that the character is allergic to soy products and requires real food not soy-substitutes thus doubling their monthly food bill. Other possibilities are sasquatch fur, ork breath, gun metal etc.

Dermal Armour (2pt merit): the character has naturally tough skin like a troll and gains a bonus of one on their body beyond the normal racial maximum. The skin does show signs of being different although not quite as lumpy as a troll's.

Low-light Eyes (1pt merit): gives a character without low-light eyes the ability to see in the dark. This merit is lost with the introduction of cybereyes.

Mute (2pt flaw): the character is unable to speak and must develop a way to communicate with their fellow runners, probably involving sign language like that used by a sasquatch. The referee must be careful to enforce this flaw at all times.

Racial Ambiguity (1pt flaw): the character is of one race but has characteristics of another race that sometimes confuse others. A human might have a tusk like an orc, pointed ears like an orc or elf, or even a horn reminiscent of a troll. Metahumans might lack some of these tell-tale signs of racial heritage. The ambiguity as to the character's race causes problems with those NPCs who have Racist Points (Shadowrun 2nd Edition, p182).

Resistance to Disease (or Poison) (2pt merit): much like the racial trait of dwarves this merit indicates a naturally tough system resistant to disease or poison. The bonus to Body rolls for disease (or poison) only is +1.

Thermographic Vision (2pt merit): this character has natural heat sensing eyesight which is lost if the character opts to use cybereyes.

Others: Merits - Huge; Flaws - Deformity, Lamé, Paraplegic (not everyone can afford cyberware, a paraplegic decker is a viable character option).

Psychological

Amnesia (3pt flaw): this flaw allows the referee to take a greater hand in development of the character's history and create surprises that can crop up later in the game. The amnesia might be caused by numerous things but suffice to say the character will have numerous problems. Cortex bomb anyone?

Phobias (1-2pt flaw): these are irrational fears of runners who have had bad experiences in the past or have built up a mental hurdle with regards to something. This phobia could relate to heights, the dark, paranormal animals, magic or something even stranger such as the number 13. The severity of the phobia is expressed in the point cost. A mild (1pt) phobia could result in the character only being able to perform actions when under the influence of the phobia with a -1 penalty to rolls, while a more severe (2pt) phobia would incur greater penalties or prohibit action entirely - frozen with fear.

Simsense Sensitivity (1pt flaw): the character has some reality perception problems and finds it hard to withdraw from the simsense state. The runner must make a Willpower (7) check to leave a simsense program, including deckers trying to jack out of the matrix.

Others: Merits - Higher Purpose; Flaws - Compulsion, Low Self Image, Nightmares, Obsession, Short Fuse, Shy, Speech Impediment.

Social

Allure/Charm (1pt merit): the character has a high sex appeal and all interaction with NPCs of the appropriate sexual gender will be more positive. All social skill rolls have a target number modified down by 2.

Poker Face (1pt merit): the character is able to completely hide emotions in stressful situations, maintaining an unreadable visage no matter what, if he so chooses. This makes the character a tough negotiator with a bonus -2 on target numbers in business deals/haggling.

Ties (2pt merit): this represents a runner's links with a certain group within general society. These ties do not work like contacts or followers, they are more tenuous connections which confer a working knowledge of the group in question. Typically the runner should have an appropriate Etiquette skill for their social ties but this is not compulsory. Suggested ties include: Corp, High Society, Judicial, Matrix, Media, Military, Police, Political, Pro Sports, Tribal, Underworld. A character with corp ties would perhaps know about corporate interactions, be able to read between the lines of the business news sheets and know something of the key personnel and structure of a particular corp. The corp might even know of the character, but they've no formal links (unless contacts are bought).

Title (1pt merit): character has or had an aristocratic title appropriate to the campaign setting. Primarily this could be used by European characters. Characters with SInS (Shadowbeat, p86) are more likely to have active titles but others may have had them in the past and still be able to use their former status to influence people.

Wanted (2pt flaw): the runner is outlawed from a particular region or nation for various crimes, or may be sought after by a particular corp for past runs against it. The character will be disadvantaged in these regions and situations, and may even encounter bounty hunters in otherwise safe territory.

Supernatural

Astral Sense (1pt merit): this merit does not bestow the ability to see astral space, but the character can sense the presence of astral observers or attackers in the immediate vicinity. Astral sense could also lead characters to detect something of a background count (Grimoire, p89) in certain places.

Charmed Existence (1pt merit): the character always gets to roll one failure dice per skill roll again. The character should rarely botch with the rule of one, and should sometimes recover from an apparent failure with a touch of luck.



Critter Ken (1pt merit): the character can sense a critter's emotional state (hostile, hungry, confused etc.) and has some chance of communicating with the critter. This is as basic as "I don't want to hurt you", and can be used to pacify or instruct the critter in a minor way.

Essence Sensitivity (1pt flaw): the runner is highly sensitive to the intrusion of technology in their system. All essence costs for cyberware are doubled, and bioware costs the character essence as if she was a mage (Shadowtech, pg5). One side effect to this flaw is the ability to sense in others their level of essence, and therefore perceive levels of cyber-enhancement not visible to the eye provided the target is within conversational distance.

Gremlins (2pt flaw): the character has a problem with equipment failures and vehicle problems as though 'gremlins' were plaguing him. Technology related rolls will be botched when complete ones, or twos or a combination of ones and twos result. Also target numbers are one point higher when dealing with tech.

Magic Resistance (1pt merit): makes the character more able to shrug off the effects of magic-use on her. The runner gains an additional Spell Defence die, and her target numbers for resistance checks versus spells are one lower no matter what the spell.

Magic Susceptibility (1pt flaw): the character is particularly affected by magic; target numbers for spell resistance checks are raised by one, and he has one less resistance die.

Unseen Ally (2pt merit): the character has a guardian angel of sorts - a free willed spirit or elemental that seeks to protect the character for motives only it probably knows (referee's discretion). This ally will serve in a similar way to a summoned spirit but it does not obey the character's orders, sometimes mistakes the character's intentions and can make things worse. It is listed as a merit because the ally will provide more beneficial aid than annoyances.

Conclusion

I recommend that referees with access to Storyteller sourcebooks (*Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage* and the upcoming *Wraith*) draw on even more merits and flaws. Some are obviously inappropriate, being designed around the perils of being a vampire or werewolf, but others can be readily integrated into a Shadowrun campaign to add role playing depth and colour. ■



Drelthar Firefast felt very confident of her ability. She watched with little concern as Renali the Red weaved his hands in intricate patterns, the formula of his spell spilling from his contorted mouth like a tornado of abuse.

Drelthar steadied her own thoughts, before delving into her mind for the correct wording and then she began to mouth her spell. Her hands moved in a blur and the invocation came instantly to mind and motion.

In disbelief, his spell still only half uttered, Renali became engulfed in searing green flame, his enchantment simply too slow to match the elf's specialised magic.

Drelthar watched with grim satisfaction as her opponent vanished in the dancing flames.

"They don't call me Firefast for nothing," the invoker snickered.

It Ain't Easy Being A Mage

In 2nd Edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons playing a mage character is never easy. With no armour, precious few hit points and no mundane weapons of real value (not to mention a feeble chance of actually landing a blow), all a wizard can count on are his spells.

Yet, although all the above disadvantages are his alone the mage's lifeblood - magic - is equally available to all multi-classed characters (fighter/mage, thief/mage, etc.). Admittedly, these characters pay more experience to advance, but they receive the talents of another class in compensation.

So what is on offer to make it worthwhile to play a single class wizard? Well it is true that the mage may specialise in a school (Invocation, Abjuration etc.) and so receive extra spells, but the casting of such magics remain essentially the same and there is an additional penalty in that the specialist loses access to two or more of the opposing schools of magic. It all hardly seems worth while.

In contrast, single class warriors have the option of specialising in chosen weapons at first level and then as they advance. This ability gives the warrior character something no other can boast, making them unique in their field.

What I am suggesting here is a parallel system of specialisation exclusive to single class mages. Instead of specialising in spell schools however the mage spends non-weapon proficiency slots to master specific spells, similar to fighter weapon specialisation. This proposed alternative system should create a distinction between standard wizards and their multi-class counterparts, as well as adding a depth to your player character wizards.

Spell Specialisation

Using non-weapon proficiencies the wizard has the option of spending one slot to "purchase" *Spell Lore*; a new non-weapon proficiency for spell specialisation, available only to single class wizards (including specialists, wild mages and elementalists) with Intelligence 16 or greater. Add this entry to the Wizards proficiency table on page 55 of the *Player's Handbook*:

Spell Lore(specific spell) INT -1 1 slot

PERSON POV

How many players of Advanced there have lamented at the restriction you ever wanted to personalise you to do just that - *spell specialisation*

Wizards with the *spell lore* proficiency have studied the chosen spell (which must be castable by them at the time of specialisation) with utmost intensity. They know it's casting inside and out... and have in fact made alterations to it's formula. The resulting spell is personally improved; tailor made to suit each wizard's particular needs.

Standard mages receive 3 points to spend on the options listed below, in order to increase the effectiveness of their castings. School specialists receive 4 points, if the spell is within their chosen school, allotting only 2 points otherwise. Points may be spent in any combination; ie. all in one or over various options. There are eight to choose from, meaning that even two wizards specialising in the same spell will probably have different advantages available to them.

All points need not be allotted at the time of specialisation, but may be saved for application in later levels. Once an option is chosen, however, it cannot be changed. Like warrior weapon specialisation, the benefits increase as the caster increases in level: at 7th and 13th level the caster receives 1 extra option point to allot.

Any spell may only be specialised in once.

Due to the differences in a specialised spell and it's standard counterpart, the visual, auditory or some other effect of the spell often changes dramatically. A lightning bolt for instance may be pitch black in colour, or resemble multiple orbs of energy instead of lightning strokes. These changes are essentially roleplaying however, and have no real game term effects. They are the trademarks of enterprising wizards upon their chosen spells.

Regardless of the options chosen, for any benefits to emerge from a *specialised spell* casting, a successful proficiency check must be made at the beginning of the round. This check is made against INT -1 (the *Avoid Interruption* option may have penalties imposed on top of this, see description of this option below). Failure results in the spell being cast normally. At the referee's discretion, a natural 20 could result in a wild surge (see *Tome of Magic* p.7), spell backfire or some other unpredictable (and/or dangerous) effect. These reflect the hazards of tinkering with the time-honoured formulae which comprise the standard spell lists.

ALISED VER

Dungeons & Dragons wizards out
ons in the standard spell list? Have
r fireball? Well here's a great way
rules from Paul Grodzicki.

Listed and described below are the eight
suggested spell specialisation options available
to a mage seeking personalised power:

1. Reduce Casting Time

Each point spent will reduce the casting time
by 1 segment. This has no effect on spells
with casting times of more than 1 round. No
spell can have a casting time reduced to less
than 1 segment.

2. Increase Damage Caused

Each point spent increases the HP damage
caused by 1 per 2 dice the spell normally
causes (round down). Damage caused in this
way may exceed normal maximums; the caster
has given the spell greater potential through his
modifications.

3. Alter Components

Each point spent may alter either the somatic
or verbal component - removing it completely
or changing one to the other. Material
components may be removed if they have no
real value (pinch of sulphur, spiderweb, etc.),
otherwise 1 point will reduce the amount
needed (gp value, number of dragon teeth,
etc.) by 25%. A spell must have at least one
component. If only material remains, the
caster still goes through any previous somatic
and/or verbal constituents mentally while
touching the component.

4. Reduce Chance to Save

Each point increases the intensity of the spell,
with victims suffering a -1 penalty to their
saving throws.

5. Alter Miscellaneous Factor

Each point increases the duration, range, area
of effect, number of creatures affected or some
other similar factor (with the referee's
agreement) by 25%. Alternatively, the referee
may allow more general effects in the spell
description to be altered, such as the caster
being immune to his own fireball (2 points).

6. Avoid Interruption

For 2 option points, while casting the spell the
wizard attains an almost unshakable focus of
concentration. This unwavering devotion to
completing a casting gives the mage a chance
of finishing the spell when normal casters
would be interrupted, such as when running,
falling or even after taking damage.

The caster makes a proficiency check as usual,
but with a -3 penalty if running, falling or in
some similar "unstable ground" position. If

damage has been taken, each hit point of
damage point suffered imposes an additional -
2 penalty to the check. Damage taken includes
any wounds from the beginning of the casting
(typically the start of the round) until it's
planned completion as determined by
initiative. If successful, the spell is cast. If
unsuccessful, the spell is ruined as usual.
Further points invested in this option have no
additional effects.

7. Decrease Magic Resistance

For 1 point, the caster has augmented the spell
to such an extent that it reduces an enemy's
magic resistance (if any), by drawing on the
Outer Planes for increased "penetration"
power. Magic Resistance (MR) is reduced by
10% for every option point invested.

8. Advanced Memorisation

For 1 option point, the mage may memorise
the spell without the aid of a spellbook. The
wizard with this spell lore option spends
double the usual time for memorisation in a
deep meditative trance, drawing upon his
subconscious memory where the spell, in part,
remains permanently. With sufficient time the
mage reconstructs the spell formula, as if he
had memorised it normally. Note that this
does not increase the number of spells the
wizard can cast per day, and that the usual
material components (if any) are still required.

Game Balance

Some Dungeon Masters may view the *spell
lore* proficiency to be unbalancing in game
respects. It's probably worth pointing out
however that a mage will only ever specialise
in a handful of spells, that only the most
talented spellcasters have the ability to master
spells (INT 16+), and that any benefits are not
guaranteed (a successful check must be made).

Nevertheless, the above is only an outline.
Referees and/or players should feel free to
make any changes necessary to fit with their
campaign. Should clerics be allowed to
specialise in spells? Would 1 instead of 3
points be a better number to allot upon initial
specialisation? These kinds of questions can
only be answered by you and the people you
game with., that's the beauty of roleplaying!

Drelthar let loose her emerald green
fireball, it's explosion greatly
aggravating the Elementalist standing
opposite her. Swooning, the
smouldering human raised a charred
staff, the result being a large earth
elemental tearing itself from the soil.

"Tear that scrawny elf limb from
limb!" the human cried.

"Darn! Knew I should have
specialised in Teleport" cursed Drelthar.



MIDGARD

REAL PBM ROLE PLAYING

The Problem : How can there be true role playing using a PBM Format?

Puzzling the role players of the world for centuries (well, OK, at least 10 years), the problem of having a computer as the primary referee has lead to supposed 'role playing PBM games'. These games give truck loads of text material with their print out yet they still fail for 2 distinct reasons. Firstly, after a while, no matter how large the data base is, the player will begin to detect the pattern that the computer generates the text from. This eventually leads to the text being ignored because what really counts is the computers result. Secondly, the order format is still the same. You still have to write down the orders in a particular way and if there is not an order for it, then it is impossible to do. This is not role playing. This is restrictive number crunching.

The Solution : Try out Midgard !

Midgard has a huge advantage over all other attempts at PBM role playing. Firstly, the game is designed to have the players describe what they want to do, with the order system only there to show you how much you can do in one turn, how far you can move in one turn, and to get rid of all the tedious orders that shouldn't require all your time and effort to describe. The rest of the turn sheet can be written out in English to describe **exactly** what you want to do. If it is possible in the game world to do something, and most role players are capable of deciding what is possible and what is not, then you can do it. The game rules are just a guide. They allow players to discover what the world of Midgard has to offer and from there, the choice is up to them. Whether you want to be a barbarian lord bent on the destruction of all civilisation, a master assassin who can knock off anyone at any time with his / her own Network of informants across the continent filing reports on all likely targets, an Alchemist mixing their own brand of concoctions (all brand names available), or a bandit wishing nothing more than a quite life of toll collecting. The choice is, as always, yours.

Ranking's as of Cycle 12 (for the player's ego)

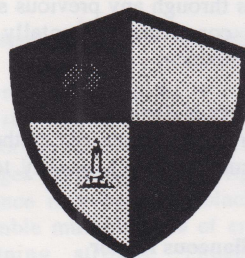
Rank	Clan Name	Faction
1	Ogres of Ptui	Banner Religion
2	XXXXXX	Ring Religion
3	Gormless Geeks	Banner Religion
4	Silverswords	Merc Verk
5	Clan McCloud	Boda Family

Midgard is a game that offers limitless adventure with quality service and at an affordable price. You can play as long as you like as often as you like. If this all sounds good but you want some more information, just ask for our free (always a big plus in the lucky country) copy of the house magazine at no obligation. It contains about 20 pages of what Midgard is like to play and what you can expect from playing it.



MIDGARD

The Game of Medieval Intrigue



Midgard - A complex game of rival clans in a world

honeycombed with rival alliances, secret societies and religions. The player is destined to either be a footnote in the annals of history or the corner stone for all thinking for a thousand generations.

**** Mixed moderation allows the flexibility of a human moderator with the consistency of a computer.**

**** A sufficient depth to allow players endless choices in determining the fate of their clan.**

**** 4 page graphical battle reports giving a detail straight out of a table top war game.**

Rule Book, Set Up and two free turns \$15 dollars

Turn fees are \$7 a turn with a turn around of at least 10 days, with no other hidden charges. The game is not dirt cheap but the quality is guaranteed to be superior. Quality turn sheets that are not just churned out by a computer are worth it.

For More Information write to:
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PO Box 542
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**Mention Australian Realms
and receive 1 additional free
turn with any new Start Up**

FISTS of FIRE and STONE

The Warrior Monk of Dark Sun by Seng A. Mah

Brute strength and psionics are the mainstream definitions of life on Athas. The gladiator fighting in the arena, and the psionist deep in the meditation in his sanctum: no two images more aptly describe the stark contrasts of this world. If each, the gladiator and the psionist, are powerful characters in their own right, then, imagine someone who is master of both combat and mental skills. The *warrior monk* is such a person, one who seeks a perfect union between psychic and physical prowess, backing strength of arm with the power of psionics and remarkable endurance.

Athas is a harsh world and the warrior monk is aware that only the fittest survive here. Unlike individuals who are termed monks on the other worlds of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, the Athasian warrior monk is no ascetic, no introspective seeker of nirvana. The root of all his training is the concept of the self-weapon: only by becoming as unto a weapon can he ensure his survival in a hostile realm. Novice monks learn *the way of fire and stone* as the discipline is called: toughening their exteriors to the rigours of the world even as they learn to hone their thoughts to sharpest instinct.

The warrior monk is an enigmatic figure, a mystery-man or woman seemingly unattached to society and its mores. Some things about them are familiar: their psionic abilities for example; others are not: they fight without weapons, a feat almost unheard of and regarded foolish by the Athasian warrior norm. Even more distantly understood is the enclave of monks. There are stories told of great ruins and ancient fortresses in the wastes, mountains and wild barrens where these individuals congregate for reasons of their own.

On Athas, only humans, muls, and half-elves can be warrior monks. All warrior monk characters have limited level advancement to 20th level. Athasian warrior monks must be lawful in alignment since strict discipline is an essential part of their training. This training simultaneously emphasises the development of mental and physical attributes; thus they must have the following minimum ability scores: Strength 13, Constitution 14, Wisdom 14,

Dexterity 14 and Intelligence 13. There is no bonus on to experience points gained for possessing exceptional scores in these abilities. A warrior monk with a strength of 18 can, however, roll for exceptional strength. After 12th level, the warrior monk receives 2hp per level. He is also entitled to full defensive adjustment due to high dexterity scores.

Warrior monk characters use the following level advancement table:

Table 1: Warrior Monk Experience Levels

Level	Warrior Monk	Hit Dice (d8)
1	0	1
2	2,250	2
3	4,750	3
4	10,000	4
5	22,500	5
6	45,000	6
7	90,000	7
8	150,000	8
9	350,000	9
10	500,000	10
11	700,000	11
12	950,000	12
13	1,250,000	12+2
14	1,750,000	12+4
15	2,250,000	12+6
16	2,750,000	12+8
17	3,250,000	12+10
18	3,750,000	12+12
19	4,250,000	12+14
20	4,750,000	20+16

COMBAT

In combat, the warrior monk uses the warrior's THACO numbers but is forbidden weapon specialisation, and cannot wear armour, or use shields. He saves as a rogue when rolling for saving throws. The warrior monk can use any melee or throwing weapon available on Athas, excluding bows and crossbows. Monks, however, tend to shun melee weapons, preferring the specialist mode of open-hand combat, reflecting their commitment to the concept of the *one weapon*.

The *one weapon* form of combat is the ultimate synthesis of mental and physical abilities. If the *Oriental Adventures Handbook* is available, styles of combat can be created by

the referee. In this case, Athasian martial arts usually consist of Hard or Hard/Soft forms (see *OA* p102). While weapon proficiency slots are spent on learning new styles, special manoeuvres can be bought using *either* weapon *or* non-weapon proficiency slots. Note that under no circumstance should oriental martial arts styles be implemented in your *Dark Sun* campaign; kung-fu, karate, and jujitsu are not combat styles endemic to Athas. In their place are more spectacular and bizarre forms of unarmed combat. Table 2. shows three martial arts styles widely practised by Athasian warrior monks.

Note that martial arts cannot be used in conjunction with psychometabolic powers which transforms part of the monk's body into a weapon, for example, Body Weaponry or Graft Weapon as this would upset the original premise of open hand combat.

The following, simpler, method of open-hand combat is provided if the *OA* is unavailable. At 1st and 2nd level the warrior monk does 1d6 damage per open-hand attack. At 3rd level and for every 3 levels after that, she gains a +1 bonus to her damage rolls (ie 1d6+2 at 6th, 1d6+3 at 8th). The monk also gains extra open-hand attacks as she progresses in levels: at 3rd level, she can do an extra open-hand attack every five rounds (5/4). At 7th level, this is increased to 3/2. At 9th level, this becomes 5/2, and at 15th level, she makes 3 attacks per round. When she reaches 17th level, she can make a staggering 4 open-hand attacks per round! Monks run in this manner also get better Armour Class as they gain experience - for every 4 levels, subtract one from the monks AC.

PROFICIENCIES

The warrior monk can learn non-weapon proficiencies from the following groups: General, Priest, Rogue and Warrior. Monks also learn *meditation*, the method of achieving a deep state of concentration, wherein he focuses and regains expended energies. An hour of meditation counts as two hours sleep. A meditating monk not only naturally heals faster, but recovers spent PSP's at a more rapid rate. Meditation uses up a full optional proficiency slot.

Table 2: Martial Combat Styles

Style	# Att	Dam	AC	Prin. At Hand	Spec Manv.
Giantstrike	2/1	d8	8		Strike 1,2,3 Mental 2,4,5 Kick 2
Glamrangs Grasp	2/1	d6	7	Body	Throw 3 Lock 1,2,3,4 Mental 1,2,3,4 Throw 2 Vital Area 2 Movement 3
Blooded Elf	2/1	d6	6	Legs	Movement 1,3,4,5 Mental 1,2,4 Throw 1 Kick 1

Blindfighting, endurance and tumbling must also be acquired before any free slots can be spent on other skills. Weapon and non-weapon proficiencies for monks are acquired at the rate shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Proficiency Slots

Weapons Proficiencies			Nonweapon Proficiencies	
Initial	#Levels	Penalty	Initial	#Levels
3	3	-3	4	2

If the *OA* martial arts method is used, Missile Deflection, Meditation and Blind Fighting are now viable special manoeuvres, replacing their functions as non-weapon proficiencies and special abilities (see Special Abilities below).

PSIONICS

Reflecting a commitment to the union of mind and body, the warrior monk has access to limited psionic power. Table 4. shows the psionic progression of the warrior monk.

The range of psionic powers available to a warrior monk is limited to those from the following disciplines: Psychometabolism, Clairsentience and Telepathy. Psychometabolism will always be the monks primary discipline. Their inherent potential and subsequent PSP increases are always half that calculated from Table 5. of the *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. But for these restrictions, the monk functions as a psionist as described in *Psionics Handbook*.

THE MAGIC TABOO

The warrior monk believes magic to be unnatural because it is drawn from a source outside the self. The magic taboo forbids the use of all spells and enchanted items, including potions, rings and weapons. A warrior monk will *never* voluntarily subject himself to magic, no matter how benevolent, preferring instead, to rely on his own psionics.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

The warrior monk possesses special abilities not available to other classes. He can dodge and knock aside non-magical missiles if he makes his saving throw vs. petrification. Each potential hit must be saved separately. (If the martial art styles from *OA Handbook* are used, this ability is treated as the Movement Special Manoeuvre: Missile

Deflection, and can only be acquired through the expenditure of weapon or non-weapon proficiency slots).

The warrior monk also selects a form of elemental attack to which he is particularly adept against. A successful save against such an attack form negates any damage that might otherwise occur. If he fails, the warrior monk sustains only 1/2 damage. Elemental attacks include those of magical and mundane nature; for example, a warrior monk who opts for fire as an element he can resist, can use this ability against fireball spells or flaming oil thrown at him. For a listing of elemental spells, both sorcerous and priestly, see Appendix 1 of *Tome Of Magic* and page 56 of the *Dark Sun* rule book.

A monk's physiology is also conditioned to withstand the effects of some poisons. They saves as a dwarf against all injected and ingested poisons. Contact poison has its normal chance of affecting warrio monks.

The monks also gain new abilities as she rises up in level:

- Upon attaining 7th level, the warrior monk becomes resistant to spells, rods and wands, saving against them as a dwarf. When using unarmed combat, he can strike as a +1 weapon if he successfully makes a saving

throw vs. petrification. This power lasts for the duration of combat. Them Monk can attempt the saving throw once per session of combat.

- At 8th level, the destructive effect of defiler spellcasting does not affect them.

- At 9th level, the warrior monk becomes immune to diseases, including those inflicted by monsters and spells. They also gain the power to strike as a +2 weapon upon a successful saving throw vs. petrification when using open-handed combat.

- By the time a warrior monk achieves 12th level, he has harnessed his mental energies so completely as to become immune to telepathic attacks. The monk's unarmed combat skills now enable him to attack as a +3 magical weapon on a successful saving throw vs. petrification.

- At 15th level the warrior monk is immune to all poisons.

- An 18th-level monk is not affected by quest or geas spells and his life-expectancy is doubled. Any aging effect is forestalled for twice the number of years listed. If subjected to artificially induced aging, via spell or psionics, he ages only half the number of years rolled.

- Once a warrior monk achieves 20th level, he gains the ability to regenerate as if he had a constitution of 24. Also at this stage, he ceases to grow old, remaining at the age he was upon attaining 20th level.

For all this potential power, the monk must still abide by certain restrictions. Once a day, for an hour at dawn, the warrior monk must exercise, a ritual which collects all bodily energies in anticipation of the trials of the coming day. Failure to observe this regimen exacts a penalty: for each day the monk goes without exercise, he loses either the use of one special ability (including special manoeuvres and psionic powers), or suffers -1 on his attack and saving throws (this penalty is cumulative, hence after 2 days without exercise, a monk can suffer -2 on attack and saving throws). The player selects the type of penalty. For each loss, the monk must have an hour's uninterrupted exercise, before regaining the ability.

Table 4: Psionic Powers

Level	Number of Disciplines	Number of Sciences	Number of Devotions	Defensive Modes
1	-	-	-	-
2	-	-	-	-
3	1	1	2	1
4	1	1	4	1
5	2	2	6	2
6	2	2	8	2
7	2	3	9	3
8	3	3	10	3
9	3	3	11	4
10	3	4	12	4
11	3	4	13	4
12	3	4	14	5
13	3	4	15	5
14	3	4	16	5
15	3	5	17	5
16	3	5	18	5
17	3	5	19	5
18	3	6	20	5
19	3	6	21	5
20	3	7	22	5

HIERARCHY

The *enclave* is where most warrior monks are taught their abilities, and while it possesses some semblance of hierarchical structuring, it is less a monastic order than a group of monks with common belief and combat manoeuvres. Enclaves are found in rough, isolated regions; ideal environments for the training of initiates and novices. The destiny of a warrior monk is, however, not constrained to the enclave. Upon completing training, the warrior monk is free to stay or leave. Most go on to become wanderers or adventurers, others prefer the secluded life of a hermit, some even hire their considerable abilities out as mercenaries.

The warrior monk who chooses to remain with their enclave becomes part of its hierarchy - see Table 5. for ranking titles. Holding rank in an enclave has its advantages. Attaining rank is, however, not easy. Proper ranking, i.e., those with command potential, begins after 7th (Disciple) level.

Table 5. Warrior Monk Ranks

Level	Rank
1 - 2	Aspirant
2 - 4	Initiate
5 - 6	Adept
7	Disciple
8	Immaculate
9 - 11	Master
12 - 14	Superior Master
15 - 17	Grand Master
18 - 19	Immaculate Master
20	Great Master

When a warrior monk qualifies for entry into Immaculate rank, he must show his expertise in open-hand combat against an Immaculate of the level he is striving for before a monastic council of Masters and a Superior Master. If he wishes to go on to become a Master, he must engage one of the current Masters in unarmed combat before a similar council, this time presided over by a Grand Master. Defeat in any of these cases means that the monk must earn an additional 50,000 experience points before becoming eligible to challenge for the title again.

For every rank beyond Master the warrior monk tries to attain, he must embark on a venture to test his mettle and prove that he is worthy of so exalted a place in the hierarchy. These tests, designated by a monk of the rank he hopes to achieve, will take no less than 3 months to achieve and will involve all his abilities. If a monk fails to complete a test, he must amass an extra 100,000 experience points before he can try again.

Each enclave can only support a limited number of high-ranking warrior monks. What this number is will depend on the enclave: as a rule of the thumb, there are only 2d2 Superior Masters, 1d3 Grand Masters, 1d2 Immaculate Masters and 1 Great Master per enclave. A warrior monk will never be allowed into a position which is already filled, unless one of the current occupants is willing to vacate. An ambitious warrior monk can, however, contest that occupant in open-hand combat before a council of superiors. If he wins, he can try for

the test. Otherwise, he must earn 50,000 additional experience points before he can re-issue his challenge.

A warrior monk close to amassing the required amount of experience to qualify for Master level can alternatively opt to leave the enclave and form one of his own. To do this, he must find a suitable location for the new enclave and the funds and labour to construct a building to house it. He will then attract 5d4 followers, all of them 1st level adepts. The new monastery will also serve as home to 2d3 of the following individuals who will be loyal to the warrior monk's cause (d20 for results, d4+1 for level, race: 01-05 thri-kreen, 05-13 halfling, 14-35 dwarf, 36-67 human, 68-77 elf, 78-90 mul, 91-95 half-elf, 96-00 half-giant; void where prohibited):

Table 6: Followers

Roll d20	Class
1	Druid
2-3	Cleric
4-5	Preserver or defiler
6-12	Fighter
13-15	Gladiator
16-17	Ranger
18	Psionicist
19	Bard
20	Warrior/Priest or Warrior/Psionicist

For every level gained after the 9th, 1d4 1st level monks and 1 special individual will join the new monastery.

The benefits of rank are, at Immaculate level, the warrior monk gains the loyalty of up to 2d20+8 aspirants and initiates (monks of 1st to 6th level), adding 2d4 followers and 1d3 special individuals (see above) for every new rank gained thereafter.

He can also petition for favours from his superiors. Petitions can be lodged once every 100 days; the chance of favours being granted is 5% plus an additional 5% for every rank attained above Immaculate plus any modifiers subject to the nature of the petition. Generally, referees should allow any reasonable request (one which would not upset the balance of your campaign) and restrict those which might seem too extreme.

Ranking monks (Immaculate or higher) also gain access to meta-psionic sciences and devotions, now that he has time and resources to pursue more intensive psionic study. The choice to follow the meta-psionic discipline must be made at Immaculate rank (8th level) at the forfeiture of gaining a new discipline in either Telepathy or Clairsentience.

Table 7. indicates what experience point awards a warrior monk can expect to attain.

Table 7: Warrior Monk xp Awards

Award	Action
10xp	per Hit Dice of opponent defeated with open-hand combat.
10xp	per Hit Dice of foe defeated using Psychometabolism.
10,000-50,000xp	for completion of test or quest. ■



MELDERS

Nanotech Evolved Chameleons
Designed by Jonathon A. Spear

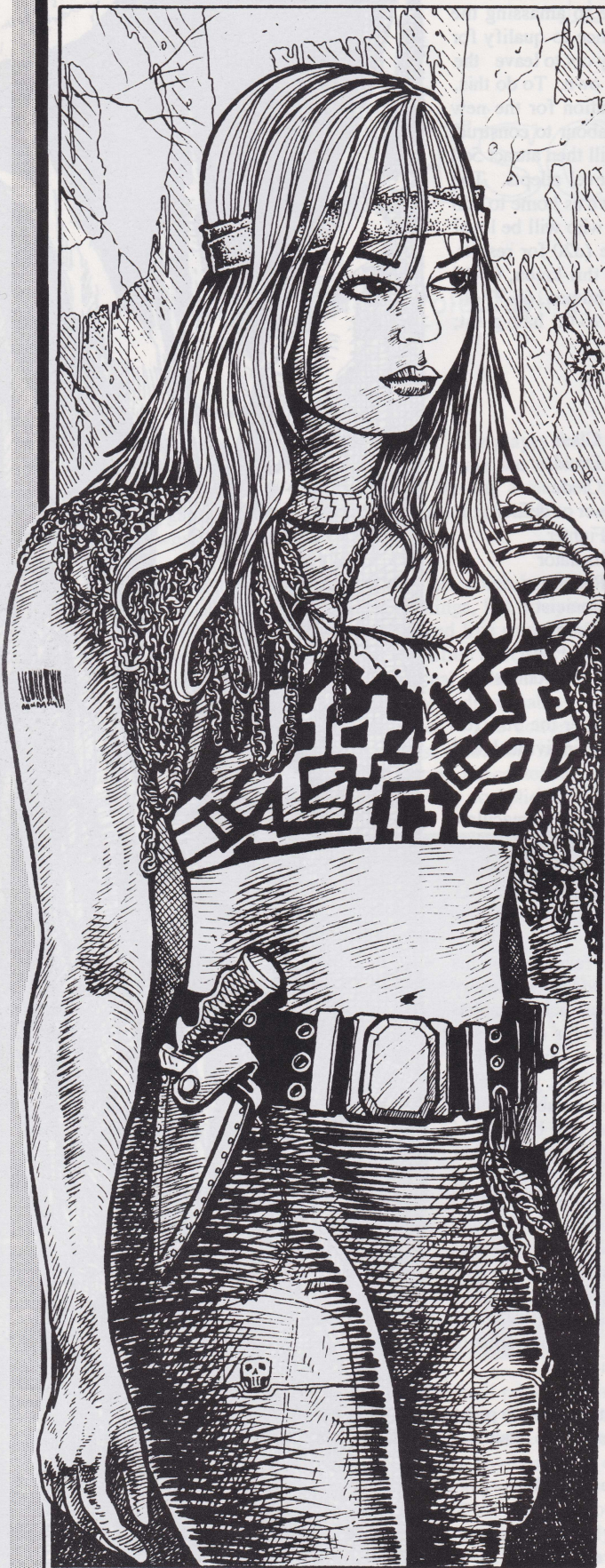
Personal Log Entry 132.13
Dr. David Chaing
Center for Disease Control
May 13, 2027

Whilst only making up a small portion of the Evolved (around 1%), the so-called "Melders" are capable of exhibiting some of the most dramatic physical changes of all survivors of the Carbon Plague. Melders are actually able to meld themselves into existing physical structures! Due to the chameleon-like abilities of these members of the Evolved, attempts to capture them for scientific investigation have only recently proved successful.

Melders seem to possess a far greater amount of Supercarbon molecules within their bodies than other Evolved forms allowing them to transform their entire bodies into a pliable form of silvery hexite. This ability in itself is of little usefulness, although the transformation from flesh to hexite is a sight to behold! It is what a Melder may do when he or she has been transformed that is remarkable. Melders may physically become as one with inanimate solid objects, adding their own physical mass to the density of the object they have melded with. How is this done? A damn good question! From the limited experimentation my team and I have been able to undertake, it seems that the key to this process lies in the hexite transformation. It appears that the pliable form of hexite that Melders form into is capable of undergoing incredibly rapid chemical change. This change allows the hexite to form into any solid element or compound that we are presently aware of. How the nanomachines within this form of the Evolved achieve this incredible transformation is entirely beyond anyone's present knowledge.

There are several observable stages to the melding of a Melder's body with a solid inanimate object. Firstly, the Melder must metamorph into a pliable hexite form. This hexite form appears and operates identically to the manner in which the Melder normally does with his or her flesh and blood body. The only exception is that the body of the Melder becomes slightly tougher and takes on a distinctive silver colouring. Secondly, the Melder must be physically touching the object which he or she wishes to meld into. Next, the Melder wills those body parts which are touching the object to transform into the material that the object is composed of. Once begun, this process spreads throughout the entire body of the Melder, who appears to be "sucked" into the object. A disturbing sight, I can assure you!

What is more, the nanotech-created molecules of the Melder's body are able to flow between those of the object, allowing the Melder to move within the object. This process results in an increase in the object's density (proportional to the Melder's size), with no outward physical effect on the object. The transformation may be



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reversed at any time, as the Melder reforms his or her hexite body from the object and then resumes a flesh and blood form. The entire process, from normal human body to solid object or vice-versa takes approximately twenty seconds.

Whilst within an object it appears that the Melder retains all forms of consciousness as well as tactile and auditory senses, smell and taste. Vision, however, is rendered impossible to the Melder. He or she is unable to move the object or operate any machinery whilst within it, although movement within the object itself is possible. In addition, a Melder may be harmed whilst within an object. In fact, the destruction of an object which the Melder has melded into may result in his or her death. A Melder who has become part of a metal object remains susceptible to strong electrical currents which seem to disrupt the transformed hexite molecules, resulting in an immediate return to human form. The following mesh of metal and flesh is invariably fatal. How Melders are able to retain a sense of personal identity or consciousness whilst melded with an object is an interesting scientific and philosophical question. As yet this question remains unanswered, as does that of why Melders are unable to meld into liquid or gaseous forms. Only time and years of research will allow us to solve these mysteries.

The melding abilities of these Evolved allow them to become the most advanced form of chameleon possible - their only limitations being their inability to transform into liquid or gaseous forms, and the presence of a solid object that is large enough to accommodate their mass. The enormous military and espionage possibilities of Melders have not gone unnoticed, with many such bodies now interested in acquiring samples of this form of evolved for their own "inquiries". Such acquisition attempts have been largely fruitless, however, due to the incredible evasive abilities that are possessed by Melders. Many ISA, Corporate Security and military agents on the trail of Melders have been foiled as their prey simply melds through solid walls or into the ground! Only attempts involving surprise attacks, tasers and vast amounts of sedative have proved successful in capturing a live Melder. Many would kill to get their hands on a Melder.

In fact, several have...

Melder Skill: Melding [COOL]

This skill represents the Melder's ability to transform her body into hexite-form and subsequently meld into an existing solid inanimate object. Table 1. lists the difficulty factors of transforming your body into pliable hexite over different time periods. Table 2. lists the difficulty factors involved in melding your hexite body into or out of an object, moving around in an object and surviving the destruction of an object you are melded into, all in relation to the density of the object involved. Take careful note of all special provisions that apply.

Melding skill starts at level +1.

The Melding Process

- (1) Transform body into pliable hexite form.
- (2) Remain in physical contact with object to be melded into.
- (3) Transform hexite into required material and "flow" into object.

Objects melded into must be solid and inanimate objects.

Objects melded into must be of a sufficient size to accommodate the Melder's body.

Melders simply moving through an object are not limited by this prerequisite.

Whilst in an object, the Melder may hear, smell, taste and touch things, but cannot see anything.

Whilst in pliable hexite form, the Melder's body has an SP of 10 on all locations.

Table 1.

Hexite Transformation	Time\Difficulty	Table
Time Taken	Difficulty	
40 seconds	5	
30 seconds	10	
20 seconds	15	
10 seconds	20	
5 seconds	25	

Thus the less time taken to Meld with an inanimate object increases the difficulty of the task; this is critical in pursuit or combat situations.

Table 2.

Density	Enter\Exit	Move	Survival
Flimsy	5	MAX2	+2
Light	10	MAX1.5	+1
Average	15	MA	+0
Dense	20	MA/2	-1
Very Dense	25	MA/3	-2

Survival - This column denotes the modifier that applies to the Death Save that must be made if the object the character is in is destroyed or subject to a strong electrical current. A failed save results in death as the character as he or she fails to escape the object before it is destroyed (or they return to human form, in the case of electrocution). A successful save means that the character has escaped from the object unharmed.

Flimsy Objects- includes foam, clothing, paper products and so forth.

Light Objects- includes light wood, dense textiles etc.

Average Objects- includes soil, wood, most plastics etc.

Dense Objects- includes concrete, most metals, rocks etc.

Very Dense Objects-includes diamonds, crystalline steel, security doors etc.

Reward: Alive Only

CorpSec has posted a \$5000 reward for the capture of a living Melder. They have not had to cough up the cash as yet, but several bounty hunters are known to have taken up the challenge.

The kids had better stay close to the concrete...

FORGOTTEN BEASTS

Warhammer Fantasy Battle 4th edition is a simpler and faster-playing version of Games Workshop's highly enjoyable fantasy wargame, revised at the cost of reducing the scope and variability of the rules; one such area being the Bestiary. This article is therefore an unofficial compilation of some of the more interesting creatures that didn't make the 4th edition but do make a great addition to the game. by Andrew Wright



Direwolves

Basically Direwolves are larger and considerably smarter versions of the Giant Wolf, with night-black fur and blazing red eyes (the last attribute appears to be a common feature of many Evil/Chaos monsters). Their ferocity and intelligence thus makes them greatly feared in many communities.

Applications

Restricted to Orc/Goblin, Chaos, and Dark Elf armies. Can be used as monster steeds for Goblin, Orc, Dark Elf, Chaos Human, and even Beastmen or Black Orc character models. Alternatively, if you're feeling lavish with points value, they can form packs of 1-5 models. Being both strong and fast they make ideal back-up units to support heavy cavalry (eg. Orc Boar-Riders, Chaos Knights, and Dark Elf Cold One-riders). Lastly, what could be more appropriate and ridiculously expensive for an Orc/Goblin army than the sight of a chariot drawn by Direwolves?

PROFILE

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Pts.
9	5	0	4	4	3	4	2	9	70

Special Rules

Fear - Any Direwolf or 'unit' of Direwolves may let loose with a nerve-grating howl on any of its turns, as long as it is not engaged in combat. Enemy models within 8" of the Direwolf/Direwolves at this time must make an immediate Fear test; if failed the models are rendered immobile for their following turn, shivering with horror. Fear-stricken troops cannot charge, move or engage in missile combat. They can fight in melee combat, their opponents being of more immediate concern than some howling canine. Direwolves can't howl if fleeing because of a failed Break Test etc. Direwolves do not cause Fear themselves, thus troops don't take Fear tests if charged by/or charging them.

Monsters - All rules on Monster mounts are applicable to Direwolves, but units of Direwolves are +1 to hit in missile combat, like all other monsters, regardless of whatever role they are carrying out.

Giant Bats

These large beasts are found almost everywhere, from huge black jungle specimens to the migratory white-furred polar bats that fly south for the winter. They are of course related to the smaller bats that often make up the animal Swarms summoned by battle-wizards.

Applications

Giant Bats are restricted to Undead and Orc/Goblin armies. In these armies they must be used as units of cavalry (ridden by Night Goblins in Goblin armies or Skeletons in undead armies), or as riding steeds for character models (only Night Goblin characters or Wights/Liches/Vampires/Necromancers). Such Giant Bat cavalry units are limited to 1 per unit per army due to their unique and rare nature; take, for example, the Night Goblin Doom Divers who are reputed to be those sorry individuals whose applications to join the ranks of Giant Bat riders were turned down.

PROFILE

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Pts.
1	3	0	2	2	1	3	1	4	2

Special Rules

Fly - Giant Bats can fly and are thus subject to all the rules on flight in the Warhammer rule book. However, due to their small size they are limited to flying 12" a turn (as opposed to 24"). This means their charge range is also 12", but they can still 'fly high' and ignore all terrain penalties just like other flying models.

Flying Steed - Giant Bats count as riding steeds as they only have 1 wound. All rules on Riding Steeds are therefore applicable (like +1 to the Saving Throw), whilst the points cost of a warrior riding a Giant Bat is found by doubling the cost of the rider and adding just 1 extra point. Cheap eh?

Mammoths

Little is more terrifying to your average soldier than the sight of one of these beasts bearing down on you, its tiny eyes maddened with fury. Taking on the appearance of a large, fairly hirsute elephant, a mammoth makes a valuable addition to any army, being virtually invincible and very strong.

Applications

The usual manner for fielding a mammoth in a battle involves the presence of up to ten hardened warriors (commonly barbarian or caveman types) riding on its back, often on a special log platform for stability. In very rare cases, a Mammoth may serve as a riding beast for such large and heavy races like Giants, Ogres and Minotaurs. (Trolls are excluded from this list as they merely see mammoths as a quick way to stock up the winter food store).

PROFILE

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Pts.
8	3	0	8	8	6	3	3	7	300

Special Rules

Monsters - Mammoths count as monsters, thus all normal rules on monster mounts apply. They can either be ridden by up to 10 man size creatures, or by one large humanoid.

Terror - As one would expect Mammoths, being fairly sizable beasts, cause terror as described in the Warhammer rulebook.

Trunk Attack - One of a Mammoth's attacks is using its highly prehensile trunk. If it hits any target under 10' then the victim is raised high in the air before being flung back amongst its comrades. The victim takes a Strength 5 hit whilst his or her unit suffers an additional D6 Strength 3 hits.

Trolls

Trolls get a raw deal in 4th Edition, being reduced to 'uniform' hulks who must be accompanied by some sort of Goblinoid Hero to lessen the chance of Stupidity setting in. Gone are the days of Troll Heroes (strong in both stomach and mind) lumbering across the battlefield to feast upon a particularly choice unit of Halfling spearmen. However, those days can still return as below are the attributes for three levels of Troll Hero, to lead their less intelligent brethren into battle.

Applications

Troll characters may be used as the leaders of units of trolls, in which case no other character model of any other race may join the unit. Troll units and characters may be armed with Two-handed Weapons (+2 Points; usually some sort of gigantic bone club) and Boulders (+2 Points; treat as Range 12" and Strength 4).

PROFILE

Big Troll

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Pts.
6	4	2	6	4	3	2	4	4	110

Huge Troll

6	5	3	6	5	4	3	5	5	180
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Enormous Troll

6	6	4	6	5	5	4	6	6	240
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Special Rules

All special rules on Trolls as given in the 4th Edition Bestiary also apply to Troll Heroes and Heroines.

Giant Frogs & Toads

Huge amphibian horrors such as these have been introduced to more populace areas chiefly due to their extremely edible flesh, and as a result have spread through many northern marshes causing considerable danger for the local human inhabitants.



Applications

Restricted to Bretonnian and Orc/Goblin armies. Giant Frogs may be herded together in batches of 1 to 6 creatures controlled by a Bretonnian or Goblin Animal Handler (treat as Skaven Packmasters except the Frog's Ld is used for Leadership tests) who has developed some degree of empathy for these creatures.

PROFILE

Giant Frog

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Pts.
3	2	0	3	3	2	2	1	8	7

Bretonnian Animal Handler

4	4	3	4	3	1	4	1	7	8
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Goblin Animal Handler

4	3	3	4	3	1	3	1	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Special Rules

Tongue Attack - During the Shooting phase each Giant Frog model may make a single attack on any enemy model within 6". Normal targeting rules apply (such as line of sight) for this attack, and it hits automatically causing a Strength 3 hit. Any model that takes damage is assumed to be swallowed by the Giant Frog so there is no saving throw. ■

Situations Vacant

Wanted: Freelance writer(s) with an intimate knowledge of the Forgotten Realms campaign and AD&D 2nd Edition rules. Must be able to spell Menzoberranzan without recourse to the box; must be willing to work to impossible deadlines, put up with a brute of an editor and to handle the instant notoriety that publication in Australian Realms brings. If you have what it takes, write to Forgotten Realms Vacancy, PO Box 220, Morley WA 6943.

NOT TWO HUNDRED TONS AGAIN!

This article explores a number of ways that BattleTech players can enhance their games. It is based on ideas for force selection and objective-setting gleaned from tournament and social play.

by David J. Low

INTRODUCTION

BattleTech is a simple game. The players each choose a few 'Mechs that add up to some tonnage, set up a map or two, and spend the next couple of hours pounding each other into snail snot. The first time they do this, it's great. But by the time you've played this sort of encounter a few dozen times, its attraction starts to wane. So, for all those who have been playing on two mapboards with 200 tons each for years, here are a few ideas gleaned from tournaments, conventions, and conversations, to help enliven your sessions.

When you set up a game, there are three things you have to decide upon. Firstly, what **forces** are going to take part; secondly, **where** (terrain-wise) are they going to meet; and finally, decide upon a **goal** for each side. I'll deal with each of these in turn although when setting up a scenario for yourself you should try and consider all three at the same time, especially if you are going to organise a tournament which should have an overall linking theme.



SETTING UP FORCES

Tonnage & Technology

The basic idea in setting up forces is one I've already mentioned - tonnage limits; for example each players gets 200 tons of 3025 (or 3050, or Clan) technology. There are a few simple expansions to this such as setting a minimum and maximum number of 'Mechs eg. at least three but no more than six 'Mechs per side; force certain selections eg. must include a *Wolverine* variant; or eliminate 'Mechs eg. no medium 'Mechs allowed. You could allow mixtures of technology (150 tons 3025, plus 150 tons 3050 each), and combine that with the earlier ideas. More drastically, you can have different technology on each side (you get 300 tons 3025, I get 150 tons Clan). For this case, however, it is a matter of some dispute as to how to balance Clan, 3050, and 3025 technology. Ultimately, it depends on the terrain and the victory conditions, but a group of players will generally arrive at a consensus. If you can't, check out the Bidding System later in this article.

One popular idea for balancing different technologies is to assign a multiplier for each type. It is usually easiest to deal in some abstract point system for this - say that 3050 technology costs 1

point per ton, 3025 costs 2/3 point per ton, and Clan costs 1.5 points per ton. Give each side a total number of points to build their lance from. Decide beforehand if you will allow players to mix technology in their force, and any other selection restrictions.

Engine Rating

What else can we try? How about setting a total Engine Rating allowed for each side? Count XL engines as about 1.5 x rating, or some equally agreeable multiple, and go for it. This trades off manoeuvrability with firepower; an *Awesome* costs the same as a *Spider*! This system must be used carefully; while a lone *Spider* may be able to defeat a lone *Awesome*, in a lance-versus-lance confrontation the lights are in trouble. MechForce North America go the other way with their Combat Values, which do not consider speed at all, being solely concerned with armour and weaponry. If you elect to set forces based on total Combat Values, beware of this (and *Dasher-D's* in particular). Alternatively, you could allow a total Armour Factor for each side, or total weapon weight, or... use your imagination!

MechWarriors

So far we have assumed that all MechWarriors are created equal, but as you are no doubt aware, changing the Gunnery and Piloting skill levels can have a significant effect on a battle. Although the following systems were designed with one-on-one battles in mind, they are easily extended to multiple units per side. The first idea, used in the MechForce Clan Bloodname Tournaments at GenCon and Adelaide, simply sets the base Piloting and Gunnery levels depending on the weight class of the 'Mech according to the following table:

Class	Piloting	Gunnery	Reflexes
Assault	6	5	4
Heavy	5	4	5
Medium	4	3	6
Light	3	2	7

The Reflexes score is used as in the MechWarrior 2nd Edition RPG, adding the value to each initiative roll. If you want to include differing technologies with this sort of system, assume the above table for 3050, improve all values by one for 3025, and downgrade them by one for Clan. Note that for more than one 'Mech per side, each 'Mech would have a separate initiative roll. The system was originally used with the Solaris VII duelling rules, making initiative rather important. For normal BattleTech you may want to

simply total the modifiers for each side and add to the initiative roll. An evening's entertainment could be had by choosing 'Mechs randomly from the variant books and using the appropriate MechWarrior skills from the table.

A more detailed version of this idea allows players to generate their 'Mech and MechWarrior together, somewhat like an RPG character. By setting costs for everything you think is important, a lance made up of individuals can be constructed. If you use start with the following costs, they can be tinkered to your own tastes:

- 1 point per ton of 'Mech
- 10 points per level of Piloting improvement
- 10 points per level of Gunnery improvement
- 5 points per level of Reflexes

where the initial Piloting target is 8, the base Gunnery target is 7, and each level of Reflexes confers an initiative bonus of +1. Set reasonable limits, such as minimum targets of 2, and allow about 120 points per 'Mech to get a relatively balanced force. Alternatively, you could allow $N \times 120$ points with N 'Mechs per side, but this could present dangers (such as the 'Elite Assault 'Mech plus farmhands' lance). To balance between different technologies in this case, change the cost of 'Mechs - say 1.5 points per ton of 3050, and 2.5 points per ton of Clan. Again, note that individual initiative rolls are preferred. This sort of setup is perfect for a big 'Mech bash with each player controlling just one 'Mech and either dividing into teams or playing all-on-all.

Economic

How about an economic game? The cost in C-Bills for most 'Mechs can be calculated or taken straight from published sources (such as Peter Stone's miniatures rules in the *White Metal* book produced by Jedko Games). Each player can be allowed a set budget for purchasing forces. This is especially good for a mini-campaign where spare parts can be purchased for repairs and reloads. Even pilots and techs can be bought - try a cost of $0.1MCb \times (Level)^2$ where Level is the improvement over base targets of 8. This gives an average cost of 2.5MCb per pilot which can be figured into the total cash available. Be sure to allow time between battles for repair and resupply; nobody said that this has to be *ample time*...

Bidding

Perhaps the best method of balancing forces, especially with different technologies, is to let the players decide themselves. In

the Bidding System one side of the battle has a fixed composition, and the players bid down the size of the opposition. Tonnage is the easiest thing to use in bidding, but players will no doubt find other statistics to use (MFNA combat values come to mind). The lowest bid is then available for the successful player to make up their force. This is quite suitable for scenarios involving the Clans.

For example, we might set up a scenario like one of those described later, and decide that the Defender will have a 3025 lance featuring a *Marauder*, *Thunderbolt*, *Hunchback* and a *Javelin*. We set victory conditions, and possibly terrain. The players then alternate tonnage bids for the attacking Clan force. Note that it is essential for the players to know the victory conditions for both sides when making their bids. Depending on the victory conditions (or blood-alcohol content of the bidders), some very different battles can ensue. It is again important to decide if any other restrictions will apply to the force bid, especially the number of 'Mechs allowed.

The bidding system can be good for same-tech battles as well, usually by virtue of deliberately unbalanced victory conditions (which leads to bidding aimed at re-balancing the scenario). For example, the fixed lance may be of moderate tonnage but only has to survive for a short time. Players would have to bid relatively high to have a chance at victory within the time constraints. The truly masochistic may enjoy bidding against a lance including, or made up of, 'non-optimal' 'Mechs such as the *Rifleman*, *Blackjack*, *Scorpion* or *JagerMech*. I apologise to any pilots of the first three (if you pilot a *JagerMech*, you don't deserve an apology - you deserve a medal for surviving long enough to read this article).



SETTING THE TERRAIN

Creative Use of the Map Sheets

Hopefully, the above suggestions have begun to stimulate your creative juices. The next step is to think about the field of battle, where the main concern is players becoming bored with the same map sheets that they have played on for years. Try an old FASA trick - consider all Water hexes as Woods, for example. This can



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The tournament
featured team
events (two on
two) as shown
here and
individual
awards.**

dramatically alter how you play on some maps. If you have the original cardboard maps, one whole quarter can be folded out of sight to produce a non-playable area (consider the vacant area to be either a chasm or mountain). The same effect can be visualised on the paper maps by those who, like me, wouldn't dream of cutting them. Two of these can be combined to give either a U-shaped playing area, or a zigzag.

Instead of playing on two regularly aligned maps, play on four. This makes manoeuvre much more important, giving those fast light 'Mechs somewhere to run to, as well as emphasising the difference between Large Lasers and LRMs. You could set up the maps in a non-regular way like an 'I' or a 'T' (being careful about the overlap area). One idea that has been tried is an open rectangle of maps (three by three, with the middle map removed), but this is best with more than just four 'Mechs per side. Finally, you could arrange the maps with the Ishiyama Tunnels from Solaris VII as the only link between them. When choosing maps, try different starting conditions: choose one map each, and start on your chosen map, your opponent's map, or on a random map.



SETTING OBJECTIVES

Missions

Now that we've decided on some different ways of selecting forces, and determining where those forces will fight, we should work out what they are going to do. Trying to reduce each other to component parts is certainly a simple solution, but it is possible to do a lot better. Consider an arbitrary military objective, and think about the things that you could conceivably do with it. Military analysts will tell you that there are just four basic battlefield objectives - you can look at it, damage it, transport it, or defend it. Most missions, then, will involve at least one of these actions - respectively, Scout/Scan, Sanction/Interdiction, Escort/Steal, and Assault/Defence. Consider these in turn:

Scout

Spend a set amount of time using your 'Mech's sensors to observe the objective. This could be a hex reference, an enemy 'Mech or perhaps an activity that the enemy is engaged in.

Interdiction

This mission type requires that you inflict a certain amount of damage to the objective. If the objective is the enemy force, this becomes the standard 'Mech bash scenario.

Escort

Here your forces are required to conduct the objective to safety. This can be a VIP, collateral (for example, a convoy of 'Mech parts), or a vulnerable 'Mech. If the objective started in the possession of the enemy, this becomes a 'Steal' mission).

Assault

You have to occupy the objective either by a certain time, or for a number of turns. The Defence mission involves preventing your opponent from reaching or occupying the objective.

Allocating Objectives

Maybe one player is trying to accomplish one of these missions; the other player's mission might be to prevent this, or perhaps they have an objective of their own. However, in most cases it is best to set up an encounter with opposed objectives - "You must do *this*, I have to stop you (or do it first!)"

Claiming Victory

How do you decide who won the battle? If you completed your objectives, you won a strategic victory. If your forces were savaged in the process, it would be considered a tactical loss. Like in real life it is very hard to decide on outright winners in most conflicts. If this abstract method doesn't appeal to you make up a scale of Victory Points which reflect the relative importance of the mission against the value of the forces involved. If each side has 200 tons worth one point per enemy ton destroyed and a mission worth only 50 points, your commander has obviously informed you not to lose too much trying to get those trucks across the board! If the mission was worth 150 points, however....

SCENARIO IDEAS

Finally, here are a few mission ideas. Try them with a variety of the force and terrain selection method described above to gauge their effects. Find out what works best for you!

Race

Each 'Mech must cross the board and exit the far side. Vicious Variation - 'Mechs must reach the far side and return.

Retrieval

Place a vehicle in the centre of the playing area. It is activated when one side gets a 'Mech adjacent. From that point on, it is controlled by the side with the greatest tonnage within four hexes. The idea is to get the vehicle off your side of the board. Vicious Variation - give the vehicle weapons. Extremely Vicious Variation - use a 'Mech rather than a vehicle.

Recon

Each side designates an enemy 'Mech as their target. At the end of each turn you get one point per friendly 'Mech within three hexes of your target. The most points after 15 or so turns wins. Vicious Variation - you may not shoot at your target. Extremely Vicious Variation - you may either scan your target (and get a point) or shoot (not at your target), but not both.

So Sorry

Unfortunately I do not have a special offer for you in this issue. New games of Combat, Trolls Bottom, Battle Master, Isle of Crowns and Balance of Power have recently started.

Naturally, Australia's most popular PBM game, Quest, is still available with 3 free turns.

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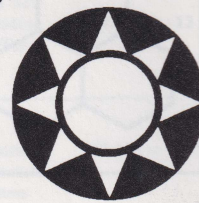
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— Edward Lee

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REALMS INDEX



Issue 1 - 32 pages

This highly collectible premier issue of Realms comes in a sturdy full colour cover and is packed full of **AD&D** material (including a scenario and a **Dragonlance** article) and other articles dealing with **Champions**, **Gamma World Australia** and role playing in general. This issue comes together with issue 2, both for the price of \$4.95.

Issue 2 - 32 pages

We sell issue 2 together with issue 1 as an introductory bonus! This issue is 32 pages packed full of **AD&D**, including an Egyptian style scenario, **Cthulhu**, **Champions** and other regular features. The special offer on issues 1 & 2 (being sold together for \$4.95) represents great value for 64 pages of articles and scenarios on your favourite games.

Issue 3 - 32 pages

Issue 3 was a **Warhammer 40,000** special, featuring a beautiful Pask colour cover showing a war troll and the rules inside the magazine for playing such a creature on the battlefield. Also inside are rules for Space Rats (**Skaven** in **Warhammer 40,000**) and articles covering **AD&D**, **Gamma World Australia**, **Rolemaster** and **Champions**.

Issue 4 - 32 pages

This issue has a stunning Pask cover from our **Rebellion** Sci-Fi setting and features a **Traveller** scenario, articles for **AD&D** (including the very popular 'More Thrills From More Skills' proficiencies article), **Warhammer FRP**, **Warhammer FB**, **Warhammer 40K** and **Champions**.

Issue 5 - 32 pages

Issue 5 is packed with articles for **AD&D**, **Runequest**, **Warhammer 40,000**, **Paranoia** and the **Rebellion** RPG. Also included is a full colour miniature painting article showing *Space Rats* from issue 3 and our regular features.

Issue 6 - 36 pages

On the cover you catch your first glimpse of **Unae**, beware the gargoyles! Inside articles on **AD&D** Barbarians, **Mecha**, **Narnia**, **Battletech**, Buckets of Blood a **Warhammer 40,000** short story and the first instalments of both the **A-Team** and **Shadowrun Australia** - jointly the most popular series Realms has yet run!

Issue 7 - 40 pages

The Githyanki special! Featuring a fantastic cover painting of a Githyanki by Pask, scenario and a Githyanki spelljammer. This issue also contains material for **AD&D's** **Dark Sun**, **Warhammer FRP** Sea Elves, **Warhammer 40,000**, **Battletech**, the second instalments of the **A-Team** and **Shadowrun Australia**, plus the first **Unae** article 'The Orcs of Unae'.

Issue 8 - 40 pages

Unae comes on line! What has grown to become one of Australia's most popular game worlds, gets further detailed with a scenario named *'The Forest'* Also in this issue is the first part of a two part article on converting **Warhammer 40,000** into **WH40K Role Play**, **Shadowrun Australia**, the **A-Team**, **Battletech**, **AD&D**, and **Runequest**.

Issue 9 - 44 pages

Issue 9 is crammed full of **Shadowrun Australia**, the **A-Team**, **AD&D**, **Vampire**, a **Shadowrun** scenario, **Unae** scenario, the second part of **WH40K Role Play**, **Battletech** and all of our regular features.

Issue 10- 44 pages

A **Battletech** special issue! Featuring a series of articles on this popular table top game. Also within are articles for **AD&D's Dark Sun**, **Shadowrun**, **Blood Bowl** and **Vampire**. This issue also has the **A-Team** and the most popular adventure we have yet run! *'The Winds of Change'* the first part of a two part mini campaign set in **Unae**.

Issue 11-44 pages

Issue 11 has the concluding part of the highly popular **Unae** mini-campaign *'Gold Rush'* also within is the first **Unae** source article detailing the Kramer Confederation and articles on **Vampire**, **AD&D's Ravenloft**, **Shadowrun Australia**, **AD&D's Dark Sun**, **Battletech**, all our regular features and a free **Werewolf** poster!

Issue 12-44 pages

Adam Megow's original cover on issue 12 illustrates the scenario within, *'Vangre Below'* for **Unae**. Also covered for the **Unae** setting are *'the Ogre Clans'* and *'Church of Baimiopia'*. The issue also sees healthy doses of new **AD&D** kits, the beginning of our **Cyberpunk** coverage, **Vampire**, the **A-Team** and **Shadowrun**.

Issue 13-52 pages

Issue 13 carries the cover of the **Earthdawn** RPG and contains an introduction for the new game. Also inside is the *'Greater Baimiopia'* source article for **Unae**, **Battletech** fiction, an **Al Qadim** scenario for **AD&D**, **Cyberpunk**, **Vampire**, the **A-Team**, **Warhammer FRP** and some invaluable articles for **AD&D** including the landmark article *'A Woman's Scorn'*. This issue is a must.

Issue 14-52 pages

This *'Play by Mail'* special issue has sixteen pages devoted to the best games available in Australia. It also features articles for **AD&D**, **Warhammer FRP**, **Earthdawn**, **Cyberpunk**, **AD&D's Dark Sun**, **Vampire**, **Shadowrun**, **Battletech**, the **A-Team** and the third source article for **Unae** covering *'Evora'*.

Issue 15-48 pages

Issue 15 features a *'Geiger'* style cover of **Tyrannids** which ties in with **Space Marine** rules for *'Epic Tyrannids'*. Also find a feature **Shadowrun** scenario set in Australia, **AD&D's Ravenloft**, **Mage**, **Unae**, **WFRP**, **Battletech** and the **A-Team**. Printed by request is *'Hell Hath No Fury'* a sequel to the most popular *'A Woman's Scorn'*.

Issue 16-48 pages

Following on the popular topic of the role of women in RPG's and in general fantasy comes an **AD&D** article detailing *'the Amazons'*. Also included are other **AD&D** articles, **Shadowrun**, **Man O' War**, **Cyberpunk**, our Cancon '94 report, the **A-Team** and the fourth source article for **Unae** *'Fletland'*.

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Changes One

Sadly, Peter Crank has had to take a sabbatical to concentrate on his studies. This has meant the Engine has had to power down. In Peter's absence we have called in a couple of our regular contributors, Adam Whitt and Graham Holman. This issue they're going to take a look at a few novels which have game tie-ins.

Adam Whitt

Christopher Kubasik's fantasy trilogy - **The Longing Ring, Mother Speaks, Poisoned Memories** (ROC, \$9.95 each) - is a body of work which would stand on its own merit without the obvious advantage of being a tie in to the *Earthdawn* game. These are terrific books, well worth the price of admission.

The trilogy has many facets which are not easily distilled in this forum, but suffice to say anyone playing *Earthdawn* will find more useful background reference material in these stories than in an equal number of rulebook pages. Which I guess is the very reason why game companies are so insistent on producing these game tie ins - besides which they sell!

The Longing Ring (unfortunate title) is the story, as told by a dragon called Mountainshadow, of J'role, a survivor of the Scourge. During his childhood in a kaer, J'role is possessed by a Horror which rules his life by turning his words into terrible pain for all listeners. To combat this affliction, and to avoid being stoned for his Horror mark, J'role pretends to be mute. The book opens as J'role becomes embroiled in an epic adventure with the famed Garlthik One Eye. J'role acquires the magical Longing Ring on his first step toward becoming a Thief Adept and the pair travel the lands of Barsaive in search of the legendary Lost City Parlainth. J'role's drunkard father follows in their wake and they are all pursued by a group of nefarious villains led by an evil magician adept, Mordom.

The action in **Mother Speaks** takes place many years after the Parlainth quest. J'role and his love from the first book, Releanna have quested all over Barsaive, married, had twin sons and separated. Then one day Releanna's village is raided by Therans and she and her sons are taken into slavery; the twins being taken by a Theran noble to form the main component of a powerful protection spell. The novel follows the progress of Releanna and J'roles quest to rescue their sons and assist in the defeat of the Theran conquest of Barsaive.

Poisoned Memories traces J'role's twilight years as he yet again becomes ensnared in adventure, the rescue of a dwarf boy Neden, son and heir to the King of Throal. Neden is taken by J'role's old enemy, Mordom as part of an intrigue to restore Theran control of Throal. In this fascinating finale to the trilogy J'role encounters Death and lives!

I did enjoy these books, although I have a few criticisms. The need to fill in the canvas for the roleplaying game meant that Kubasik takes us on a travelogue-like journey of the places and cultures that make up the campaign world of Barsaive. Personally I'd have

The Analytical Engine BOOK REVIEWS

by Whitt & Holman

It's only a game!

preferred a tighter plot, a narrower focus. And although I accept that his characters are believably complex, it's a shame Kubasik doesn't give a single person to love. All the protagonists have weaknesses which seem to outweigh their likable traits; the readers appetite for a hero is cruelly starved.

To balance this, there is much that is good in the trilogy. The framing of the series is very interesting; each novel has a different speaker narrating the events but all speakers have the same audience - J'role's twin sons. And the fantasy elements are skillfully devised with a level of realism that is reminiscent of Tim Powers - the heroes suffer pain, and lots of it.

Fact is, reading the series, one becomes aware of a certain creative tension in the background to *Earthdawn*. Kubasik's stories are quite serious; strongly flavoured and harrowing depictions of mortal endeavour marred by all too human imperfections. His *Earthdawn*, is a world of grim and bitter travail. Yet looking through the other *Earthdawn* material released, you can see FASA has aimed the game at a market that borders on teen power fantasy. Hey, let's not mince words - kaers are dungeons and the Horrors are monsters in need of a good bashing. Kubasik's Horrors serve as metaphors for the darker side of the humanity, and his heroes take on the enormous task of the transforming our reality to set humanity on the path to salvation. Hopefully this tension will resolve itself into a workable mythos which satisfies a large audience, to guarantee the success of both the game and the novels.

Volume IV in the **Dragonlance Villains** series is **Hederick the Theocrat** (TSR \$9.95) by Ellen Dodge Severson. This is Ellen's third Dragonlance novel, and much was hoped for when I dipped into its opening pages. Unfortunately I was to discover a plot with

holes in it you could fly a dragon through - the hero, Tarsenian, is over seventy yet manages accomplish more in three days than someone a third of his age would be likely to perform in thrice that time.

The story follows the unlikely career of Hederick and his arch enemies, Tarsenian (a childhood teacher) and Hederick's sister, Ancilla, a White Mage. Hederick meets Tarsenian as a boy and is indoctrinated in the ways of the New Gods by him. Hederick interprets things differently from his teacher however, and he soon has poisoned and slain his entire village, including mom! Then the story advances by a good many years to where Hederick is the High Theocrat at Solace and Tarsenian, now converted to the Old Gods by Ancilla, comes to town to knock Hederick off his vallenwood perch.

From here on in the story muddles back and forth between what evil acts Hederick is inflicting on the pliable citizenry of Solace and what his opponents are up to, which mostly hinges on the stealing of a magic artifact that protects Hederick from all harm - the Crystal Dragon.

The structure of the novel is quite interesting; the action is framed by episodes showing historian scribes writing the tale of Hederick's life as it happens. Hederick's early career is glossed over in three 'background' chapters and the rest of the book details the activities of three very eventful days in Solace. This is where the main problem with the novel arises - so many minor characters are introduced and so many major upheavals take place that you begin to lose faith in the author being able to neatly tie them together in a satisfactory conclusion. Although many of these characters and encounters are well executed (some of them literally) to my mind Severson fails to sustain the excitement of the main conflict between Hederick and Tarsenian, and the ending is falls into disappointing cliché.

Hederick the Theocrat isn't all bad; and if you don't mind suspending your disbelief to the point where seventy year olds can fight off dozens of armed guards before swimming long metres underwater and where centaurs with riders on their backs can leap temple walls at a bound, then you'll get enough enjoyment out of it to while away an afternoon.

Graham Holman

Number 11 in the **BattleTech** series, **Blood Of Heroes** (ROC \$10.95) by Andrew Keith is set on the planet Glengarry in Skye March and tells the tale of the famed mercenary Grey Death Legion who are placed in danger of extinction through the deceit and deception of he rebel Free Skye Forces. Keith spins a tale of intrigue and adventure as he begins the ongoing 'Mech careers careers of Alex Carlyle, heir to leadership of the Grey Death Legion and Caitlin DeVries, daughter of the local planet Governor General. **Blood Of Heroes** is the story of how the battle raw cadets are thrown into the front line to preserve the existence of the Legion.

Whilst the book has more than the usual amount of exciting 'Mech action, it is a story told amidst the background of political manoeuvring of the Federated Commonwealth

and its enemies. Maintaining a link with the other novels in the series FASA have even gone so far as to have Keith share an extended passage with Michael A. Stackpole's **Assumption Of Risk** word for word!

With an ending screaming for a sequel, Keith's novel is a pleasing blend of 'Mech adventure and twisting plot-lines. There are some great illustrations from Rick Harris to complement the action, and if you can wrap your mind around some of the Scottish dialect of the supporting characters you'll find **Blood Of Heroes** a good 'Mech encounter.

D.R.T. (ROC \$10.95) by James D. Long, continues the career of former Com Guard soldier Jeremiah Rose. Following on from **Main Event**, Rose has progressed to the position of Mercenary leader of the up and coming Black Thorns. Still determined to take revenge against the Clans, Rose leads the Black Thorns to the front line of the Clan/Confederation border. With a force of fourteen 'Mechs, including two captured Clan OmniMechs, the Black Thorns are catapulted into a hotbed of Clan aggression.

D.R.T. (an acronym for 'Dead Right There') is the normal FASA Corp combination of background for the BattleTech/MechWarrior games and straight storyline. The first half of the novel is taken up with the logistics of establishing a Mercenary Company and of negotiating suitable contracts which effectively follows on from the **Hot Spots** sourcebook for the BattleTech game (reviewed in issue 16). Lots of detail is provided on hiring MechWarriors, costs of maintenance and the problems of supply. This does not, however, detract from the quality of the novel, as Long fills the story with interesting facts about the Clans, their code of honour, and some of the ever-threatening Elementals who have been genetically engineered for flight.

The second half is an excellent fast-paced action adventure. Swiftly moving from space dropships to full scale battles against superior land forces, the Black Thorns come up against upgraded Com Mechs and front line Clan OmniMechs. Including, amongst others, giant Behemoths, modified Rifleman, and numerous Elementals, the Nova Cat Clan Stars easily outnumber and outgun the isolated Black Thorns; the Battle is now simply to survive. The story races to an exciting climax which is hinted at in the excellent cover painting. You are bound to get caught up in the fortunes of Jeremiah Rose and his mixed band of veterans and raw recruits. Strong relationships are forged in the life and death adventures of any mercenary company, and in the Black Thorns, Long has created a group of MechWarriors anyone would be glad to have on their side.

Rick Harris provides great illustrations throughout to add to the atmosphere and there is the usual complement of 'Mech diagrams at the end of the book. For those BattleTech devotees who got a bit bored with the political posturing of **Assumption of Risk**, you will find **D.R.T.** a welcome change; fast action, great characters, and a strong story. What more do you need before you have to strap on your Neurohelmet and go kick some... Available in May and it's a definite read. ■

Dice Are Dead

Play-By-Mail Column

Submissions To:

Dice Are Dead
PO BOX 220
Morley
WA 6943

Companies mentioned:

The Baron's Australian Midgard,
PO Box 1171, Stafford, QLD 4053
Dynamic Games, PO Box 707,
Dapto NSW 2530
Flagship Magazine
PO Box 858, Kogarah, NSW 2217
Imagination Games
PO Box 730, Glenelg SA 5045
Mercury Games, PO Box N600
Sydney, NSW 2000
PBM Enterprises
PO Box 278, Emerald VIC 3782
PBM Sports
PO Box 14219, Melbourne VIC 3000
Post-It Games, PO Box 90,
Lutwyche, QLD 4030
Roma Games, PO Box 1957,
Toowoomba QLD 4350

Changes Two

As you will have observed *Dice Are Dead* has taken on a new look. From now on in this column will be exclusively dedicated to Play By Mail gaming. Live Role Play and Freeform gaming will be covered elsewhere in the magazine in occasional feature articles; for the first of these check out *The Masquerade* on page 20 of this issue.

The State of PBM

John Tindall recently filed this report on the Australian and New Zealand Play By Mail industry, with a special focus on Cancon 94. Excerpts are reprinted here with the kind permission of **Flagship**, the global PBM magazine...

The 1994 PBM Awards were presented at a gala PBM Banquet ably organised by Peter Wheeldon. We had our best turnout ever as over 40 'elite' A&NZ PBMs attended. Most attendees were surprised at the support **PBM Sports** had. Little known at the start of the Banquet, Norman was swamped by interested players after the usual GM forum.

Roma Games was one of the few companies to launch new games. Using Post Script and a laser printer, the presentation of both **Dino Wars** and **Bacteria** is excellent. Roma Games is going very well, describing 1993 as their best year ever. With **El Mythico** now under their management, Peter Catling reports both new players and the return of some earlier ones. Almost everybody chooses Governor as their first choice these days, so these positions are being given to the inexperienced players first, evening out the competition. **Darkness of Silverfall** is also having a resurgence with new developments adding to the depth.

Douglas Coff of **Imagination Games** had travelled to Canberra from Adelaide to attend and was not disappointed. Interest in **Victory!** was such that he thought he had the start of a new game (this has since been confirmed with Game 3 also filling now). He has had most interest from miniatures and boardgame players new to the hobby. Douglas said that people shouldn't let the size of the rulebook faze them, as order entry is easy, and there is a help disk.

PBM Enterprises is going strongly, thanks to Shane. After some possibly over-generous special actions allowed by the previous **Legends** GM, Shane has had to do some tightening up. Although not all players were happy about it, old hand Leo Dingley now says "Shane is brilliant - the best GM we've ever had". Of particular interest to **Legends** players, the disliked mail surcharge has been dropped in general pricing changes. Ask **PBM Enterprises** for full details. Shane said he has 400 - 500 positions in **Legends** now, about 175 in the North Islands campaign.

Epic by contrast has an uncertain future unless more players are attracted. Also on the horizon are play-by-modem and a bulletin board. If there is a lot of interest, turn fees could come down, and in late 1994, look out for **Legends 2**.

Mercury Games attended Cancon with their own T-shirts and badges as advertising.

Trollquest version two was quite popular. Differences include faster colonisation and more open objectives. The play-by-modem option has been disappointing, "since there are many quite good games available for free", Martin said. Play by disk and a mapping program are two new features of the game. Mercury took over **Spiral Arm** versions 1 and 2 and **Galaxy** from The Australian Wizard. An 'old timers' game of **SA1** is likely soon, and Martin is balancing out **Galaxy** since the industry builders can win without need of conflict with another player.

The Baron's Midgard is doing well with Nick Horgan's service and commitment winning the support of even US players, who prefer to play in Australia because, they say, the turnaround is better! Nick expects a play by modem option by mid-1994, and also has observed that the game magazine has been his best drawcard: a flyer and the Tales of Wonder has produced a sign up every time!

The first game is progressing very well, with some level 13 players after only 17 cycles, although "the game requires more GM moderation than was expected. I've had little active support from the vendors," Nick said. Some dedicated friends have helped to the extent where the program now runs though Windows, which was previously thought impossible.

Dynamic Games also had good reason to be pleased with 1993, having won the Most Popular Game Award for **Quest**, although current numbers are down from the 800 positions at its peak. So far, over 2,200 setups have been processed. Many drop-outs were thought to be school kids who stopped after their free turns ran out - but they might come back for more in years to come! Similarly, **Isle of Crowns**, priced at \$10/10 turns is also targeted at the school market. **Against All Odds** has been stopped - little interest in no-conflict games, it seems. Nevertheless **Iron and Steam** is hoped to do well when extensive local testing is completed. Dynamic are also offering **Combat** (formerly known as Warlord) from KJC... described as a cheap **Balance of Power**-type game. Finally, Dynamic is critically looking at play-by-modem and would like to hear players' opinions.

Midgard

From **The Baron's Australian Midgard**

Reviewed by James Chao

Players control wandering Clans, allying themselves with the various Factions and striving for their own (and Factional) goals in a Middle Ages setting.

Midgard is a deceptively simple game to play, but a trial to master. This can be said of many PBM games, but I think **Midgard** overshadows the others. With both human and computer moderation, players have a fairly wide range of things to do, which becomes apparent in the later stages of the game. To get a feel of the game, we will centre on my playtest Clan, The Chaos Horde.

Chaoslord, Leader of The Chaos Horde, summoned his henchmen together. The youngest son of a minor noble, with no

chance of inheritance, I decided to go into the wide world yonder to make my fortune. I travel with my three trusted childhood friends, Swiftwind, Darkwing and Nightstalker. Together with 190 Retainers (men-at-arms), 10,000 crowns (money) and some basic supplies, we bid farewell to our loved ones (and hated elder brothers) and set out for my quest for glory.

Journeying into the nearest City, we approached a Boda City in the grips of paranoia. Being so close to an Imperial City, its owner quite rightly fears an attack, since the talk of war has been escalating for these past years. Problems aside, we approach the Boda and request a Task, which when carried out earns you crowns, retainers and (most importantly) Factional Influence. The more influence you have with a faction, the better your next task, and the higher rank you are in the faction if you Declared for the faction.

It turns out to be a relatively simple "escort and deliver unharmed" task for some minor Boda delegate to a nearby Imperial City. After spying out this city, taking some notes on it, we leave for our destination, a few steps distant. On arrival, we get our reward for finishing the task, and spy out this city. Information gathering is a popular pastime, and can make you very useful to other players in this game.

With hundreds if not thousands of cities, different land and sea terrain types, modes of travel ranging from defensive to offensive formations, road networks, bandit forces to deal with, and other distractions, much time is spent choosing the best course of action every turn to ensure survival and success.

The days pass peacefully, with The Chaos Horde doing quite well, earning crowns, retainers and influence with the various factions in the game. Deciding that this was not going to be the lifestyle I will lead for the rest of my days (though the followers seem happy enough), I decided to expand my horizons. First, I appoint Nightstalker command of the Chaos Scout military division, and send him and his new band running southwards in search of new lands and cities. With him he takes a portion of the provisions (food), crowns and other sundry goods, so that he will not have to return for a long time to resupply. Off Nightstalker goes, to boldly go where Chaoslord has not gone before. The next thing to do is settle on a faction, and I ally myself with the Getham Family. If only my brothers can see me now! How I have risen in the eyes of the populace, outshining their meagre holdings of men and supplies.

A word on Factions. There are three families - Boda (military), Roder (agriculture) and Getham (trade). Three religions - Gift (builders), Ring (seers) and Banner (war). Also present are Imperial (world domination), Blood & Fire (pagans), Barbarians (invading sea power), Society of Arms (shadow brotherhood), Merc Verk (mercenaries), and Independents (subclass Pirates, Heretics, Bandits - no affiliations). Think carefully about whom you ally with, as you will be penalised for changing factions.

With my choices made, and my market information on the various Cities I've visited

(or traded for), I set about compiling the easiest way to make money - buy low and sell high, keeping in mind weekly fluctuations. Soon, with a trade route established, I set about making myself a bundle. This is fairly easy, though time-consuming. Throughout this time, I am still looking for a major Getham City to go to.

Success! Nightstalker sends word that he has found a city with a major Getham presence, and the Clan gallops madly towards it, still trading all the while. We spend two turns on the road, and make 20,000 crowns along the way. Disaster strikes! Food shortage! Retainers start going hungry and the ranks are a mess. Quickly enter the city, and start buying stockpiles of various foodstuffs, to be converted into packets of provisions. Luckily, starvation recedes, and we have reached our destination. Now, to earn those influence points. No need for money (have lots), provisions (food is abundant) and I now have enough retainers to keep others wary (by recruiting at cities to increase your force, as retainers do double duty as soldiers and labourers - no unions here!). As long as the influence starts coming in from Getham tasks, I shall rise in the ranks of the Getham family faction, and battle it out to be one of the Seniors. With any luck, I shall have multiple tasks to do this turn - I await my turn-sheet!

Any faction you join (except Independents) each has 20 ranks for you to crawl up, and the top four positions are Seniors. Seniors are powerful entities, who may threaten or bless your position on a whim. They are also in charge of the "good stuff", and coordinate the faction's various Clans to fulfil Factional Goals. As each faction has goals that are detrimental to at least one other faction, the idea of having an overall winner is slim, although possible.

Skills can be learned at selected cities to add bonuses to your orders, and so far I have uncovered four myself, which is nothing compared to the skills available. You may also need to have certain skills to progress further in a given faction, which brings the information gathering into play again.

Various aspects of the game still not tried by myself (and others, I should think) to date, including laying siege to a city, conquering a city by force of arms (we're still too tiny compared to any city's militia), owning a city as a result of a gift of Senior Factional Positions (and its own unique set of problems), exploring another continent (we're all on the same one), clans fighting each other (we don't want to get minced by each other so early, as all are about the same size), getting Regiments (Factional Military Units - tough buggers) for special usage, fighting great naval battles (no guts to do so yet), finding an immediate use for those heliograph stations except getting a task to deliver a message there (boring!), training up our soldiers to elite units (costs too much) and generally trying out the other half of the game, when we are actually good enough.

For more information, contact Nick Horgan at The Baron's Regime, PO Box 542, Lindfield, NSW 2070.



MONSTER GALLERY

Many tales are told in the taverns of Fletland, but the one that evokes the greatest awe among the visitors to the frontier town of Alkmar is the one about the dragon(s) of the forest. It is said that great beasts live in the deep forests that bound the Varm Carga, beasts that breathe fire and feast on the flesh of men.

Olthwyn the hunter tells a chilling tale of the time he was camped in the forest and heard the bellow of the great beast as it crashed through the undergrowth. For an extra jar of ale he will also tell you the tale of the glade of dancing virgins, somewhat spoiling the enigma of the forest dragons. Even so, many within the town remember that Olthwyn's hair actually did turn white overnight, coincidentally on the very same night that he claimed to have seen the dragon. Perhaps the tales are true after all.

Kalraith Dragon, Forest

By Lee Sheppard

Climate/Terrain: Temperate forest

Frequency: Very Rare

Organisation: Solitary

Activity Cycle: Any

Diet: Carnivore

Intelligence: Average (8 - 10)

Treasure: Special

Alignment: Neutral

No Appearing: 1

Armour Class: 2

Move: 12", Sw 12"

Hit Dice: 10

THACO: 11

No of Attacks: 3 or special

Damage/Attack: 1-10/1-10/6-24

Special Attacks: Tail swipe, maul, spit venom

Special Defences: Resist fire, cold

Magic Resistance: 40%

Size: H (24')

Morale: Elite

XP Value: 9000

Kalraith dragons, are more accurately defined as great lizards, as they possess no magical abilities, a feature more common to the dragons of legend than the beasts that stalk the forests of the Varm Carga (see Issue 16). But this makes them no less dangerous.

Forest dragons have dark green scales, with each scale edged with black, making for excellent camouflage in the mottled forests of Fletland. Their slitted eyes are a deep yellow and their crest a light green when aroused or otherwise excited. Although some forest dragons possess "wings", these are now merely decorative, as Unae dragons have not flown for centuries, the power of flight lost over a number of generations.

Although not "intelligent" in our sense of the word, they are blessed with great cunning and many foolish humanoids who have tried to hunt one of these creatures have suddenly realised that it is they who have become the hunted. None have ever returned alive from a dragon quest in more recent times, so much of the detail revealed here would be unknown to players, adding to their mystery.

Combat: Forest dragons prefer to stalk or trap their prey, their great size no obvious hindrance given the thickness of the trees and shrubs in the areas of the forest where these creatures choose to dwell. A favourite method of the forest dragons is to lead prey into thicker foliage, thereby inhibiting the dexterity of smaller creatures, before crashing back through the trees and surprising their prey, the creature's great bulk ensuring that they do not themselves get entangled.

Forest dragons are not beyond using other natural hazards to their own advantage either. They will push over small trees to crush larger or more difficult prey, cause landslides, and even herd unsuspecting victims over cliffs if the opportunity presents itself.

When forced to fight directly, forest dragons attack with their front claws and savage teeth. If necessary, they can also swipe with their thick tail, a successful hit causing 2-12 points of crushing damage. In addition, should a single bite-attack cause 16 or more points of damage, then the forest dragon has successfully grasped it's victim in it's jaws, causing an additional 1D8 points of "mauling" damage as it tosses it's head from side to side. An additional 1D8 points of damage will be caused in each subsequent round until the victim is killed or manages to free itself (a successful bend bars/lift gates roll for humanoids), but no additional claw or bite attacks can be made by the dragon while the victim is thus held.

Breath weapon/special abilities: The legends speak of dragons breathing fire from their mouths, but this is inaccurate. Forest dragons actually spit an acid-like venom, which is so potent it literally "burns" on contact with most materials (including flesh). Victims of this form of attack bear similar wounds to those of burns victims, leading to the rise of the tales about dragons breathing fire.

The forest dragon can spray it's venom to a maximum distance of 30', spreading out in a rough cone shape to a maximum spread of 20'. Anyone struck by the venom must make a saving throw vs. breath weapon or suffer 6D6 points of burning damage. A successful saving throw reduces the damage by half. The dragon produces enough venom in it's poison sacks to make six spitting attacks a day.

The forest dragon's tough hide makes it naturally resistant to cold and fire, all such attacks ineffectual if a saving throw is made, and then only half damage resulting from a failed saving throw.

Habitat/Society: Forest dragons live only in the deepest and thickest parts of the forests that border the Varm Carga mountains in central Fletland. Their numbers have dwindled dramatically since the arrival of humanoids. The creatures that remain, and this is thought to be less than a dozen, are now violently protective of their own part of the deep forest, defending their territory from all comers, even those of their own kind. This last attitude probably spells the death-knell of these creatures, for there are no breeding pairs left throughout all Fletland, and this strict territorial stance has meant that no young have been born for many years. Unless something gives soon, and a male and female pair-bond, then there remains little hope for the forest dragons of Fletland.

Ecology: Forest dragons are meat-eaters, with forest deer probably forming a major part of their diet. They will eat any creature they can kill however, and many humanoids have fallen victim to a hungry forest dragon. Alchemists would probably pay a very high price for the poison sacks of a forest dragon, although the risk to obtain them could be more than any eventual payment could be worth.

NEWS

Noncon '94

"Not your conventional convention" the promo booklet tells us. Organised by Castle Enterprises, Noncon '94 is billed as Brisbane's Unconventional Roleplaying Convention and will be held at QUT Gardens Point Campus Club over the weekend of July 15th, 16th and 17th. Looking through the convention handbook the focus definitely appears to be on having FUN - something in roleplaying which is close to this writer's heart. Organisers have lined up a very special guest - Ed Greenwood of *Forgotten Realms* fame. So if you want to enjoy a great weekend's roleplaying and maybe have a chat with Ed, contact Ian or Louise on (07) 891 5673. Don't forget to tell 'em where you heard about the event!

Readers' Poll

In issue 16 we ran a Readers Poll, with over \$500 in prizes as inducement for you to send in a completed form. Initial response has been excellent, and we thank those people who have taken the time to give us their opinions. We'd just like to remind everyone else that the Poll remains open until May 31st. So get your form in and contribute to the future of Realms.

A-Team Products

Our hugely successful comic strip is about to spawn a host of spin-off products. The **A-Team Book**, a graphic novel featuring the first A-Team story as published in issues 6 to 14 plus a brand new story was scheduled for April release but has had to be put back to June because Scott suffered a short illness. For this same reason, Scott was unable to complete inking the strip in time for this issue's episode of the current storyline, so instead we've presented an excerpt from the Book (see page 48). Not available at newsagencies, you can buy your copy of this limited edition from most games specialist shops or direct from us by using the order form on page 40.

Following the graphic novel will be the **A-Team Miniatures**; a blister pack of the six A-Team characters manufactured by **Inquisition Miniatures** of Adelaide (around July). To give you a reason to paint up and use these outrageous figures, we'll be running a complete new game in issue 18 (July) of Realms! The **A-Team Bar Room Brawl Game** is a very simple and fun boardgame featuring all the knockabout mayhem you've come to expect from the world's wackiest adventuring party.

And there's the **A-Team T-shirt!** These high quality shirts feature an A3 sized image of the cover art of the Book (see ad on the back of this issue). Simply write us giving your shirt size and \$29.95 and we'll post one to you immediately.

More Realms Products

If the A-Team is not your bag, we've got other items on schedule for release this year. These include a **Scenario Special Edition** of the magazine which will feature six fully developed adventures; four fantasy, one Shadowrun and one Cyberpunk. More on that next issue. Then there's the **Unae World Book** due out in time for Christmas. Colin Taber has moved over from Assistant Editor role to concentrate his efforts on this ground-breaking project - a fantasy world detailed in Australia. The first book will focus on the Dormetian area of Unae - which is the Heletian League and it's neighbours. And we are looking at producing a colour poster sized **Unae Map**.

The 1995 schedule is also being planned out, with a book of **How To** style essays for roleplayers and referees featuring leading game designers already under way and a second Scenario Special Edition.

In addition to these moves, we're making every effort to establish a distribution in the United States so that our Stateside brothers and sisters will get to read and enjoy Realms. "Tomorrow the world," says Nick with a wicked glint in his eye!

So, these are truly exciting times for gaming in Australia, with Realms leading the way. Artists and writers wanting to take part - contact us now.

New Releases

Chaosium Inc

The big news from Chaosium is the impending appearance of their new roleplaying game **Nephilim**. Due to be unleashed at Gen Con 94 (August), the advance promotional material paints **Nephilim** as a game of deep mystery and dark magic. Realms hopes to bring you more detail next issue.

April saw Chaosium release a supplement that drools over you, and should have Cthulhu-ites gibbering and drooling in horrified excitement - **Ye Booke of Monstres**. A collection of monstrous creations and archaic misspellings inspired by the past 70 years of Cthulhu fiction. Other upcoming offerings to the unnameable and unspeakable are **The Shub-Niggurath Cycle**, a book of Cthulhu horror tales, and a brace of very useful city sourcebooks - the **Cairo Guidebook** and the **London Guidebook**.

In May players will be able to find their way around **Elric!** with the **Atlas of the Young Kingdoms**. This comprehensive guide to the world of **Elric!** includes notes for many lands and helpful adventure hints - like "Don't stand next to Elric with Stormbringer drawn" perhaps? Also for **Elric!** is **Fate of Fools** (May) scenario and **The Bronze Grimoire** (July) a book of new spells.

Palladium Books Inc

In their recent press release, Palladium books announced 1994 will be the BIGGEST year in its history. Traditionally, Palladium releases around eight new books a year, 1994 will see the release of 14 to 20 blockbuster titles.

In 1994 there are plans nine *Rifts* releases (already **Triax & The NGR** has topped 14,000 copies sold), three *Palladium Fantasy* books (**Yin Soth Jungles** in June/July is the first of these), three *Macross II* items (**Spaceships and Deck Plans Vol Two** is due late July), a Robotech release, **The Zentraedi Breakout** (May) and two new items for *Beyond the Supernatural* and *Heroes Unlimited*. Kevin, Maryann and the team are going to be very busy.

FASA Corporation

It seems FASA is out to catch the chummers at an even younger age as recently they announced the arrival of **Shadowrun Super Nintendo**. This went so well that the units sold out before even the guys and gals at FASA could have a play.

The other May releases for FASA's top-selling game of cyber-future and magic are; **Double Exposure**, an adventure in 'Seattle's cesspool of depravity and despair', sounds like nice work if you can get it; **Nosferatu** a novel by the classy team of Carl Sargent and Marc Gascoigne; and not far away is the **Denver** campaign package due in July.

The same people who have been licensed to do the **BattleTech Movie** (who are currently developing the script) have taken an option to do a feature length **Shadowrun Movie**. Watch out, chummers. Come September there will also be a **BattleTech Animated Series** (13 episodes have been contracted so far). Saban Entertainment, the producers of the X-Men series, are doing the **BattleTech** show and have the international rights so you never know we might get to see it in ANZ one day.

Other Battletech items clanking out of the Windy City and onto your tabletop are **Tukayyid**, an extended scenario pack that recreates the entire Tukayyid campaign and features a unique bidding system; **Black Thorns** a scenario pack based on the events of the novels *Main Event* and *D.R.T.*; and **Close Quarters** another novel.

By all accounts, the faith FASA placed in their fantasy game, **Earthdawn**, has been rewarded with an excellent take up rate by American gamers, and we know that Australians are playing this superbly crafted game in increasing numbers. Further products supporting the system are imminent, including **Prophecy** written by Greg Gorden, the first novel after the Chris Kubasik series (which is reviewed in this issue's *Analytical Engine*); **Denizens of Earthdawn Volume II** (July) will follow up **Volume I**'s May release looking at dwarves, obsidimen, orks and trolls.

Games Workshop Australia

Tim Wilson of GW Australia after a recent trip home to the 'old country' says he enjoyed one whole day of sunshine over there. Sounds like he is glad to be back here!

Anyhow, to welcome him back to Oz the **Chatswood Grand Opening** was an enormous success - the biggest Games Workshop have had anywhere in the world. People queued up for ages, all bought megabags of the discounted goodies, and someone even came so far as from Malaysia. Hey, we Aussies always told you people from the Old Darts that this place is special.

Dark Millennium for WH40K is out now (reviewed this issue) plus heaps of new miniatures (too numerous to mention), and more Codex's to follow **Space Wolves** and **Eldar**. What you need to do to get a full rundown on what's available and upcoming is to send away for the **GW Mail Order** catalogue advertised this issue; and while you are at it don't forget to send for your **FREE** copy of **White Dwarf** - see the tear-off coupon at the bottom of page 7.

R. Talsorian

It has been a long time coming, but the release of **Castle Falkenstein** is now imminent. At the GAMA Trade Fair in March, R. Talsorian showed off the galley proofs of their new fantasy role playing game and initial reaction is that it looks great (Realms readers have already had a foretaste of the beautiful colour plates on the covers of issue 14 and 16). Describing the development of **Castle Falkenstein** as a "hostage crisis" the Pondsmithe can look forward to sanity restored when it's released.

TSR Inc

The big release for 1994, **Planescape**, a new campaign setting for **AD&D 2nd Edition** has arrived and looks fabulous. A very attractive presentation packages an interesting setting into which characters from all the other AD&D campaigns are welcomed. Look for a thorough review in issue 18 of Australian Realms).

Other items of interest from TSR on their way to our shores are the **Monstrous Compendium** for **Planescape**; **Mystara: Karameikos Kingdom of Adventure** campaign setting converted for AD&D play; and **Van Richten's Guide to the Ancient Dead** for **Ravenloft**.

TSR's most curious set of items is the introduction of referee screens for players! The **Fighters, Wizards, Thief's** and **Priest's Screens** are all due out June and although a neat idea to combine all tables relevant to these classes, I'm not sure how many DM's will want their players hiding their dice rolls behind them.

Dangerous Journey's End?

A recently confirmed Internet message advises that TSR and GDW have settled their law suit over Gary Gygax's **Dangerous Journeys** game. TSR now owns DJ and all stocks have been surrendered to them... wonder if we'll see this game as an new dimension on TSR's 1995 release schedule?

Magic: The Gathering

And now for a good news story. **Magic: The Gathering** has taken the bullied kids of the gaming industry playground, Wizards Of The Coast, to the position of the fastest up and coming games company of 1994 with the hottest selling game produced in years.

And there's more to come; expansion packs for **Magic** and a book - **The Pocket Player's Guide** - which features ground rules for building decks and limiting numbers of certain "killer" cards, articles on deck building philosophies and other hints and tips for playing this enormously addictive game. Later this year look for **Jyhad** the fully licensed **Vampire** version of **Magic** with each player taking on the role of a vampire and the cards representing powers and minions. Under negotiation are further game tie-ins - **Cyberpunk** and **Middle Earth Role Playing**.

Interestingly Wizards of the Coast have also acquired **Ars Magica** from White Wolf and with the design wizardry of Jonathan Tweet will be pouring energy into expanding that game.

Au Revoir

A new, larger and even more committed team have brought you this all-fun issue 17 of Australian Realms. From all of us...

...see you round like a d100!

TACTICS

MAGIC The Gathering SWAP DAY

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Starts: 10 AM Saturday 28th of May

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Monday 4th July to Saturday
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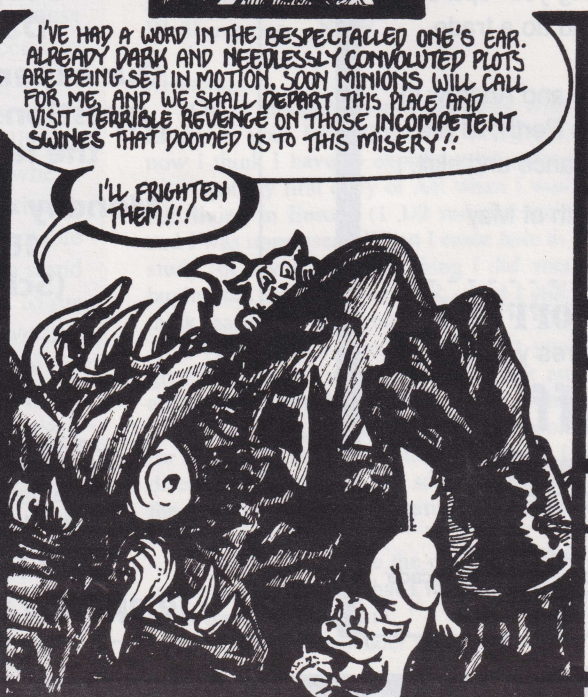
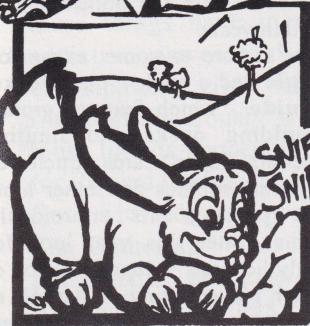
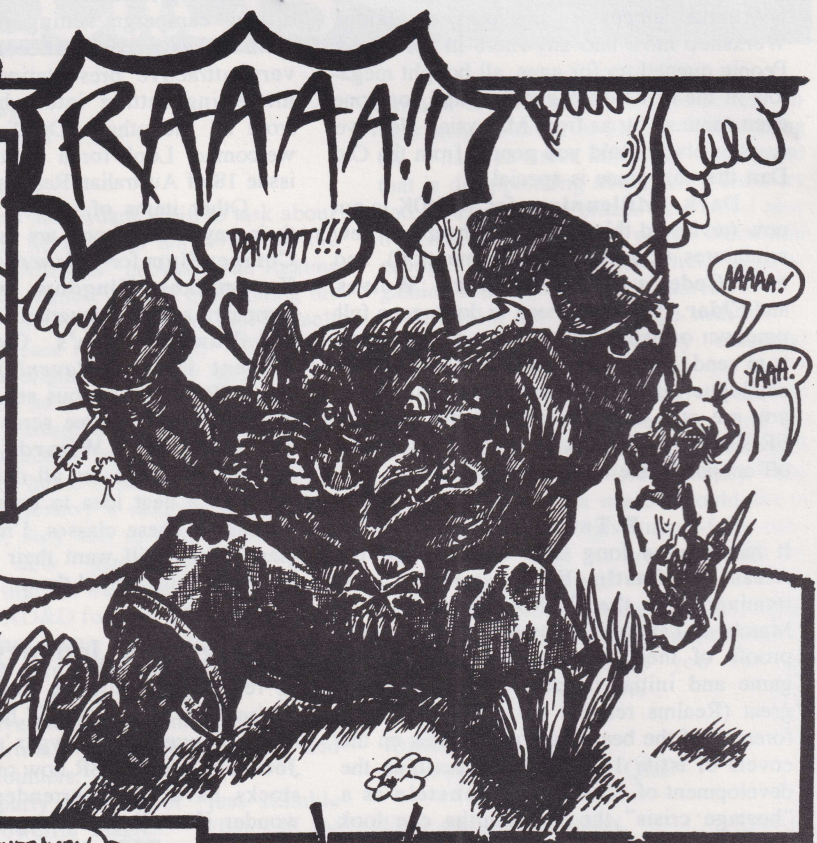
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